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International Society and Central Asia

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International Society and Central Asia

by Filippo Costa Buranelli

Thesis submitted for the degree of doctor of philosophy to
King's College London, Department of War Studies

24 March 2015

Abstract

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asia appeared on the world stage as a sub-system in the wider Eurasian continent. Because of its vast and rich natural resources and its strategic location with respect to Afghanistan, within the discipline of International Relations Central Asia has been widely considered as a mere ‘pawn’ in the competition among the Great Powers for geo-political and geo-economic advantage in the area. This framework of analysis, strongly focusing on systemic factors, has often downplayed and silenced the dense intra-regional political dynamics at play. In the few instances where these dynamics have been studied, the international relations of Central Asian states have always been read through a strongly realist framework of analysis. Since these states are more interested in dealing with foreign powers than with themselves, since there are not Central Asian regional organisations and since several problems, mostly related to water-management and border issues, hinder cooperation between them, the region has often been described as a paramount example of realism at play. This thesis, challenging the existent literature on the region, shows that an English School (ES) reading of Central Asian regional politics reveals much more than it is usually believed to be present there, and that despite the strong confrontational character of the region, these states have managed to coexist relatively peacefully. How? Drawing on a variety of primary sources, interviews with diplomats and practitioners conducted in the region and on the analysis of official documents and statements, this research finds that Central Asia represents an *in fieri*, but nonetheless existent, regional international society, featuring also local, peculiar interpretations of global norms and institutions, where cooperation and confrontation have always been intertwined and seldom mutually exclusive. Being the first work in the literature to use ES theory to study Central Asian international politics, this thesis advances two agendas: it suggests new, more nuanced and ‘autoptic’ readings of the Central Asian region while encouraging the ES to expand into the ‘heartland’, therefore bringing forward the recently established comparative agenda on international society at the regional level.

Declaration

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Acronyms

ADB – Asian Development Bank

ASEAN – Association of South East Asian Nations

BVOs – Bassejnovoe Vodnoje Ob’edinenie

CACO – Central Asian Cooperation Organisation

CAEC – Central Asian Economic Cooperation

CANWFZ – Central Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone

CAU – Central Asian Union

CICA - Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia

CST – Collective Security Treaty

CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organisation

CentrAsBat – Central Asian Peacekeeping Battalion

CIS – Community of Independent States

CTBT – Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty

EBRD – European Bank of Reconstruction and Development

ECB – European Central Bank

ECO – Economic Cooperation Organization

ECOSOC – Economic and Social Council

EEC – European Economic Community

EEU – Eurasian Economic Union

ES – English School of International Relations

EU – European Union

EurAsEC – Eurasian Economic Community

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN

GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council

GPM – Great Power Management

IAEA – International Atomic Energy Agency

ICAS – Interstate Council for the Aral Sea

ICWC – Interstate Commission for Water Coordination

IFAS – International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea

IGOs – Intergovernmental Organisations

IMU – Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

IR – International Relations

JSC – Joint-Stock Company

LAS – League of Arab States

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NPDs – National Policy Dialogues

NPT – Non-Proliferation Treaty

NWS – Nuclear-Weapon States

OIC – Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PfP – Partnership for Peace

PG – Provisional Government

PNEs – Peaceful Nuclear Explosions

REC – Regional Ecologic Centre

RGN - Regionalism

RIS – Regional International Society

RSC – Regional Security Complex

SAARC – South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

SSR – Socialist Soviet Republic

TNAs – Transnational Actors

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation

UNGA – United Nations General Assembly

UNRCCA – United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia

USD – US Dollar

UTO – United Tajik Opposition

WB – World Bank

WHO – World Health Organisation

WTO – World Trade Organisation

Chapter 1

Introduction

The context, the puzzle(s), the plan

The Kazakh chairmanship was a clear sign not only of the interest of OSCE in Central Asia, but of Central Asia in being part of international society.¹

1.1 Central Asia on the international stage

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the international system, so far structured in a bipolar logic in which two competing blocs were struggling for world hegemony, underwent a new wave of regionalisation,² the first of which had occurred during the decolonisation process in the 1950s-1960s. New regional blocs of states, nations and peoples were formed, new political spaces were opened and new prospects for international relations were raised. In particular, regions became the new *loci* in which both the production of, and the management of, insecurity were dealt with (Hurrell 1995; Hettne and Söderbaum 2000; Buzan and Wæver 2003; Hurrell 2007; Paul 2012).

Following the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, one could observe the formation of Central Europe, of the Caucasus and of Central Asia, a landlocked region between the Caspian Sea, the Russian Federation, Iran, Afghanistan and China. This region, once home to nomadic tribes and sedentary communities, foreign hordes and empires, khanates and city-states governed under Islamic rule, became ‘Russified’ in the XVIII and late XIX centuries and subsequently ‘Sovietised’ by the expansionist policy of Stalin in the late 1930s, and finally resulted in the five sovereign republics, which insisted on their territory: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Katz 1994; Anderson 1997; Roy 2000; Bogaturov 2011).

Immediately following its independence, Central Asia caught the attention of a variety of scholars. Internationalists, post-colonialists, institutionalists and

1 Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, former OSCE Secretary, Chatham House, 7 Apr 2011.

2 Here by ‘regionalisation’ it is meant, at a very basic level, a process by which states’ economic and foreign policies become more concerned with their regional neighbours) rather than with the international system on the whole).

comparativists were at the forefront of what had become a new, fertile field for political and socio-economic research, especially due to the common problems that recurrently face relatively new, independent states: those of fragile statehood (Kavalski 2010); of political transition from autocratic to democratic rule (Cummings 2002); of possible power vacuums and consequent domestic destabilisation (Dagiev 2013); of ethnic conflicts, authoritarianism, and hindered economic development (Gleason 2001; Spechler 2002; Akçali 2003; Pomfret 2006; Collins 2009).

In particular, the inability to spur economic growth and liberalisation of political regimes, alongside the inability to prevent social unrest and violent upheavals (especially in Tajikistan, 1992-1997), led International Relations (IR)³ scholars and practitioners to describe and treat it as a place connoted by chaos, violence and unresponsiveness to external stimuli to foster integration and development.

Yet, despite the novelty of the field, the years following the immediate aftermath of the independence process were marked, in the West, by a considerable neglect of the socio-economic situation of the region (Anderson 1997; Roy 2000; Lewis 2008). It was believed to be doomed to backwardness, and considered to be a 'Russian backyard', whereas other parts of the previous Soviet Union were in the spotlight, either for negotiations and new relations with the brand-new and enlarged European Union (EU), or under scrutiny by the wider international community, due to local, prolonged conflicts (Caucasus), even if Partnerships for Peace (PfP) were offered to all post-Soviet countries (Georgia in particular was very enthusiastic about PfP).

From 1991 to 2001, international engagement in the Central Asian region was more talk than action (Olcott 2005). Moreover, as Katz noted (1994), from an international politics perspective, much of the literature on the region was concerned with the foreign policy of the great powers towards the five republics, and much less with the specific international relations *within* the region.

However, Central Asia regained considerable importance in the eyes of a wide part of the international community in the years following the 2001 US-led campaign in Afghanistan. Potential spillovers of radical Islam, terrorism and drug-trafficking from and through the region's southern borders, as well as the necessity of having bases and bulwarks close to the operative, theatre of war, led experts and practitioners

3 The usual convention of defining 'International Relations' (IR) as the academic discipline and 'international relations' as the content of the discipline is adopted.

to consider the region as pivotal in the future geopolitics of Eurasia, not least for the richness in gas, oil resources and raw materials which those countries were (and are) provided with.

Since then, Central Asian states have reaffirmed their pre-eminence in the wider international context, paradoxically more for their strategic collocation and endowments than for their agency in world affairs. This pre-eminence has sparked a whole body of scholarship devoted to the 'New Great Game', that is to say the competition among the U.S., Russia, China and, to a far lesser extent, India and Turkey for political and economic influence in the region, consequently configuring the agencies of Central Asian states as 'vassals' (Soderblom 2004).

In terms of IR Theory, these recent developments have led to the adoption of a strong neorealist account of the international politics in Central Asia, based on the well-known assumptions of competition, balance of power and zero-sum games. This theoretical account, despite not being the only one, has certainly dominated the scholarship on Central Asia, as it will be shown in the literature review later. Complementary to this approach has been the recent emphasis on the so-called 'energy geopolitics', i.e. a revival of old 'Mackinderian' categories of geography and territorial influence finalised to the acquisition of supplies and large basins of natural resources, primarily natural gas, precious minerals and oil (Megoran and Sharapova 2013).

If one looks beyond the energy and geo-strategic narrative, however, one would realise that in recent years, the five Central Asian republics have gained even more importance on the international stage especially with respect to two additional important factors: on the one hand, the withdrawal of foreign troops from the Afghan soil, which will position Central Asia (in particular Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and possibly Kazakhstan) as a buffering corridor through which the military equipment of the involved Western countries can be pulled out and displaced outside the Afghan territory in late 2014; while on the other hand its position between two normatively different worlds, those of the democratic, cosmopolitan and market-oriented West, and of the authoritarian, communitarian and sovereignty-defendant Sino-Russian hemisphere (Lanteigne 2006; Kavalski 2007; Ambrosio 2008; Kavalski 2012; Lewis 2012a). Recent discourses promoted both by the liberal Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the more conservative, Westphalian Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) seem to establish competing views of international

order and its development, a competing view in which Central Asian states have still to find their position.

Surprisingly, however, few studies if any have inquired into the international norms and institutions present *in* the region. Therefore, it seems that nowadays a thorough study of the international relations *of* Central Asia and *in* Central Asia, especially as far as their normative and institutional orientations are concerned, is not only missing, but necessary, if we are to understand how these states are coping with the normative structure of the international system, the role that such a region can play in future international politics in terms of adopting and redefining norms and rules, and to follow its normative and relational trajectories.

In a world which is progressively tending to economic and financial uniformity and interdependence under the constraints of globalisation and which is at the same time politically and culturally differentiating within itself as a response to such process, a study of how Central Asia perceives itself in the wider international arena and of what its norms, rules and codified practices are when it comes to deal with international politics is not only necessary, but also vital as it would add another piece to the jigsaw puzzle of regions, regionalisms and sub-international societies, so starkly marking the post-Cold War era.

1.2 Developments in IR Theory

Like world politics itself, the fields of IR and IR Theory changed greatly after 1989-1991. Within IR Theory, new approaches and new trends were increasingly adopted and discussed: in direct correspondence with the geopolitical processes analysed earlier, the scholarly analysis of economic integration and security dynamics gradually shifted from a world scale analysis to a regional one (Hurrell 1995, Lake and Morgan 1997, Buzan and Waever 2003), and in response to the failures of the neo-realist account of international politics in explaining and foreseeing the demise of the Cold War and the consequential restructuring of the world order, theories such as Constructivism and the English School (ES) started being adopted on a regional scale as well.

In particular, the ES, with its emphasis on norms, procedures and codified practices better known as ‘institutions’ such as state sovereignty, diplomacy, international law, human rights protection and so forth (Bull 1977; Wight 1977;

Buzan 2004; Navari 2009) has been recently applied to the regional level of analysis (Ayoob 1999; Diez and Whitman 2002; Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009; Costa-Buranelli 2014a; Stivachtis 2014), proving to be a useful tool for analysis of the internal dynamics of specific configurations of state-order at a level below the global one, identifying specific rules of conduct and customs in different regional contexts.

Such enterprise has indeed inaugurated a new agenda both within IR more generally and within the ES in particular, addressing the need to understand, represent and link between them the normative, institutional and rule-oriented behaviour of different regions and different regional international societies. Much work has been carried out on the EU and Europe more generally (Diez and Whitman 2002, Stivachtis 2008, Stivachtis 2010) and the Middle East (Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009), Latin America (Merke 2011) and East Asia (Buzan and Zhang 2014a), but a comprehensive work on the concept of international society to grasp the significance and the meaning of the international relations of the post-Soviet space and of Central Asia *per se* is still missing.

This seems, to some extent, surprising, given the recent birth of such states and the novelty of their international relations, their already noted normatively and institutionally ambiguous position among two competing discourses and their common shared past. Indeed, returning now to Central Asia, one may question the need to study such a region, the decision to defend such an enterprise and especially the move to adopt an ES framework of analysis.

To begin, a shift in theory must not be regarded as a mere change of dress, or perspective, but it always implies a new set of questions to be answered, therefore expanding our understanding of the ontology we are inquiring on. Some gaps and issues needing deeper investigation have been discussed above. However, other puzzles are, in my opinion, in need of an answer or, if already provided, of a better or alternative answer.

Why is it that Central Asian states, despite being portrayed as ‘shaky’ and ‘unstable’, have been nonetheless able to avoid ‘balkanisation’, great inter-state clashes and to cope with violent internal conflicts without regional conflagration, such as the civil war in Tajikistan and the recent upheavals in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 and 2010? Why is that despite their illiberal politics and their remoteness from the Western world they seem to share the most basic norms of international coexistence, and have been rarely if ever depicted as ‘rogue states’ and ‘outside the international

order’?

Why is that despite the sometimes bitter competition among themselves, especially as far as water, borders and ethnic divisions are concerned, Central Asian countries have so far managed their international relations in an orderly fashion, and still emphasise and share recurrent and visible commonalities, such as geographical proximity, appeals to common resolution to common regional problems, a tendency to legitimise autocratic rule, a strong emphasis on sovereignty paired with a permissive attitude towards external powers’ intrusion, not to mention common historical and cultural bonds?

Why were there so many examples of regional organisations comprising the Central Asian republics,⁴ if they have proved many times to be ineffective in managing and dealing with regional issues (for an overview, see Allison 2008)? What norms did they incorporate, and why did the Central Asian states claim adherence to them?

In Central Asia one can still observe structural impediments to regional integration and full-fledged cooperation, such as security dilemmas, prestige contests, territorial disputes, nationalist resentments, and economic conflicts. Yet the region seems to hold to an acceptable level of inter-state peace. How to account for this overarching, relational ambiguity?

The existing literature is currently unable to answer such questions, and actually it has never addressed them, or if it has, then only in an indirect and incomplete way, as the discussion of the literature will demonstrate later. Indeed, in one of the most recent works on the connection between regional studies and IR Theory, the regions under scrutiny are Western Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, South-East Asia and Latin America. The post-Soviet space, and particularly Central Asia, are still far from this kind of ideational and normative analysis, despite a desperate need of it especially with reference to norm of cohabitation ‘which seem to be present in the region’ (Paul 2012: 19), pointed at also by Rajan Menon and Hendrik Spruyt in their seminal study of post-USSR international relations between the new sovereign states: ‘actors [in Central Asia] seem largely successfully to have found ways of coexisting without violence, even in the absence of agreement’ (Menon and Spruyt 1998: 178).

4 Most of the time without Turkmenistan, due to its foreign policy doctrine of ‘positive neutrality’. See Anceschi (2008).

1.3 The research questions and the justification of the research

The dominant neorealist theoretical paradigm has prevented scholars and practitioners from questioning their own knowledge on the present status of Central Asian international relations, on the position of the region in the international scene and on its institutional (in ES terms) characteristics. A real gap exists in this respect, both from a theoretical and from an empirical point of view. Conversely, given also the novelty of its regional turn, the ES seems better equipped to portray Central Asian states as actors, agents and protagonists instead of mere pawns in the New Great Game among the external, more powerful states, and is provided with the methods and the theoretical instruments to assess whether there is a forming, or already established, Central Asian international society, whose meaning is explained in the seminal passage of Bull's *The Anarchical Society* (1977: 13):

A society of states (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.

In sum, the puzzles above led to the following research questions, which this project intends to answer: *How has the region adapted to the normative structure of contemporary world politics? Is there a regional international society in Central Asia? If yes, how has it evolved and how does it relate to the international society at the global level? And to what extent is it definable as pluralist or solidarist? If not, is it forming? And what are the current specific characteristics and features of the relations among those countries? Is there any peculiar institution which is not present in the wider international society?*

What this research seeks to provide, or at least seeks to contribute to, is a new theoretical framework able to capture the multi-facetedness of Central Asian state-relations among themselves stressing the norms, rules and institutions, if any, at play in the region. What is missing in the literature, i.e. the viewpoint of these states on international relations and international practices, therefore, will be brought to the surface.

Why this, one could ask? In my opinion, the reason is to be found not only in the advancement of the knowledge of the region and of the theoretical progress of the

ES, but also and mainly in the prospects for future foreign-policy directions. As a matter of fact, to understand other regions for the prospects of policy-making and development planning it is of utmost importance to understand how the states forming that region regulate their relations both with the world and with their regional peers, to grasp through what institutions they work and to what extent such institutions are entrenched in the regional, relational framework.

This research project, moreover, takes on the challenge already proposed by Fred Halliday (2009) and aims at being a *double test*, both ontological and theoretical. On the ontological side, it seeks to shed light on a region so far quite neglected in the study of international politics in an innovative manner, focussing on an under-examined array of issues such as the adherence of these states to the norms and principles that regulate the common management of world politics, e.g. sovereignty, diplomacy, international law, environmental stewardship and nationalism.

Moreover, still on the ontological side, this project seeks also to inquire into the possible ongoing, foreseeable formation, or even existence, of a *regional* international society in Central Asia, i.e. the presence of a pattern of relations that, irrespective of their cooperative or conflictual character, present some form of regularity and shared understanding of how such relations should be conducted.

On the theoretical side, conversely, this work seeks to bring the ES not in *terra incognita*, as Buzan said when applying it for the first time consistently on a regional level when dealing with the Middle East, but in *terra incognitissima*. Its purpose is not only to continue the enterprise of the ES scholarly community to apply the theory on a regional level, but also to apply it, for the first time, to a region which has been almost entirely detached from the ‘core’ of international relations (read ‘the West’) until very recently.

In support of this goal, and more generally of the need of a comparative research on different international societies, Hurrell argues that ‘the history of regional state formation has helped to produce regional international societies that may have elective affinities with their allegedly universal Westphalian original but also have important distinctive features’ (2007: 133), whereas with specific reference to Central Asia and Euro-centric categories of analysis, Cummings has rightly noted that ‘attempting to further an in-depth understanding of [the Central Asian] region is worthwhile, since it increases our critical faculties for assessing often Eurocentric methods and methodologies’ (Cummings 2012: 5).

Furthermore, the ES provides ‘an alternative and non-materialist theoretical perspective, which explores the complex social constitution of the regional order in terms of primary institutions, offering a contextualised social structural view of the region’, and enriches ‘theoretical perspectives that [...] specialists can bring to bear on their region’ (Buzan and Zhang 2014a: 15).

An additional test concerns the methods to be employed. As a matter of fact, speaking of ES methods may sound like a contradiction in itself (Navari 2009). That is to say, a strong theoretical work thoroughly employing methods and techniques specific to the ES has been so far missing. Therefore, not only will this research discuss for the first time in a comprehensive work, the methodological tools and analytical devices of the theory, but will also use them to verify their reliability and usefulness in discovering and treating social facts.

1.4 What kind of work is this?

A further question one may ask about the present research is what kind of theory it proposes, or what kind of framework it adopts. As a matter of fact, it is clear that the nature of this work is neither *causal (explanatory)* nor *normative*. It does not seek to establish a cause-effect relation among two variables deliberately chosen, or among two groups of variables. Moreover, it does not attempt to indicate a better path, or the right position, or what should be done. The question is not *why?*, nor *should?*, but, conversely, *how?*, or *is/are there?*.

In fact, this work adopts and defends a specific conception of theory, that of ‘international theory’ (Suganami 2005), described as ‘a tradition of speculation about relations between states, a tradition imagined as the twin of speculation about the state to which the name “political theory” is appropriated’ (Wight in Suganami 2005: 30). It is a framework that provides a deeper, more thorough and more comprehensive description of the international relations of a given system (be it on a world- or regional scale) than traditional accounts of international relations such as realism and liberalism. An ‘international theory’ puts world politics in a relational, evolutionary, diachronic historical dimension and specifies the assumptions, beliefs and normative stands of the actors involved in the maintenance of such system (Neumann 2014: 334-336; 350).

An international theory is one that ‘offers a systematic representation of the realm of world politics [in this case regional] that gives us a coherent understanding of it’ (Suganami 2005: 42). On this treatment of theory, one may agree with the international sociologist Evan Luard, very influential on the ES, when he said that the main scope of a theory must be to improve our ‘understanding’ of social facts (Luard 1976). Following the three main steps of observation, analysis and conclusions, research into an international society based on an ES understanding of ‘theory’ explains ‘the nature of that society and the behaviour of nations and men within it’, adding more information and more nuanced in an inductive rather than in a deductive, imposed method of investigation (Luard 1976: 22).

It may be argued that this kind of theory certainly lacks the elegance and the scientific procedures of causal theories, and the ethics-based, justice-inspired commitments of normative theories, and may be accused of being a mere descriptive engagement with a given ontology. However, not only does the methodological pluralism involved in this theoretical framework allow the researcher to shed light on important and under-treated issues (Little 2000), but reminds him that ‘achieving description that does not come with conceptual baggage is a sufficiently worthy aim in its own right’ (Latour and Law in Greener 2011: 94), and that ‘in the most elementary sense, “theory” [...] “explains” or gives a better understanding of what we observe and experience’ (Suganami 2005: 34).

Before concluding this short introduction, the *tentative* nature of the work should be stressed and reaffirmed as well. This research is intended to discover whether a regional international society is present or not, or, alternatively, whether such regional international society is in formation, developing or being hindered by external or internal factors. It does not aim necessarily to demonstrate deterministically that *there is* a regional international society, nor that *there will be*.

Only a thorough research into the practices, the behaviours and the normative stands of these countries (i.e. of their representatives) will reveal whether there are sufficient commonalities to speak of some form of regional socialisation. By combining the present literature with the intuition that a regional society is possibly present or forming in Central Asia, I aim to adopt what Glaser has called ‘theoretical sensitivity’, i.e. the combination of inductive theory and already existing forms of knowledge (Greener 2011: 96).

Moreover, even if this will be dealt later more in depth, it is appropriate to say that this research will focus on something different from regionalism, albeit being related to it: that is to say that the main focus will be on the practices, ideas and common institutions adopted by the Central Asian states to manage their international politics in the region, and less on the prospects and potentials for regional integration and institutionalisation of cooperative relations, co-ordinated problem-solving attitude and common solutions to common problems. The relationship between the two concepts, however, is undeniable and will be dealt with more thoroughly in the course of the thesis.

In sum, the present work contributes to the existing scholarship of IR, Central Asian studies and ES in five main, original respects:

- it advances the present knowledge of the international relations of Central Asian states, putting them in a normative and institutional context and showing to what extent the values and the norms informing the global international society are finding fertile ground to grow and consolidate, thus studying for the first time the Central Asian system in sociological depth;
- it explores how general norms and codes of conduct are read, re-interpreted and followed in a different regional context, emphasising ‘the centrality of the political agency of regional actors to understanding the production and shaping of normative order’ (Buzan and Zhang 2014b: 226);
- it sheds new light on the cooperation-competition debate in the region, putting it in a new framework and giving a more multifaceted and denser account of Central Asian states’ international relations;
- it pulls Central Asia out of the ‘presentism’ of contemporary IR and puts the region in a holistic, evolutionary historical dimension by using the methodological pluralism of the ES and adopting its historical vein;
- it advances current knowledge about the relationship between a regional international society, regionalism and a regional security complex (RSC).

To conclude, the structure of the work will be the following: after reviewing the literature both on Central Asia and on the ES, and pointing to the consistent and persistent *lacunae* present in them, I will offer a thorough view of the theory I intend

to use, the methodology I will craft and the ontology I will inquire into, so that the reader will have the ‘vocabulary’ to understand and to follow the enterprise in its development.

The central part of the thesis will consist of the analysis, through the study of declarations, speeches, official documents and archival sources, of what in ES lexicon are called the primary (sovereignty, diplomacy, international law etc.) and secondary (intergovernmental and regional ‘regimes’) institutions of the region, to assess the presence and the degree of ‘thickness’ of the hypothesised regional international society. Two chapters are intended to cover the formation and the development of the supposed regional international society: the first one deals with Central Asia in the 1990s, and relies mainly on archival material and official transcripts of media and documents released at that time, while the second one relies mainly on interviews conducted in the region.

The following chapter departs from the regional level of analysis and projects the analysis of what norms and rules are followed by the Central Asian states at the international level, and through an analysis of votes in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) it seeks to find convergence and similarities in their normative stances.

In the concluding chapter, the significance and the contribution of the research will be assessed, its potential benefits for factual policy-making will be evaluated and its contribution both to the studies of the region and to the development of the ES will be discussed. A general comment on the findings will be provided, and the relations put under scrutiny will be analysed in relation to the concept of regionalism and the hypothetical formation of an RSC (Buzan, Wæver et al. 1998; Buzan and Wæver 2003; Yandas 2005). The conclusions will also discuss directions for further research.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 The purpose and the structure of the literature review

In this chapter, the present-day literature on the region and on the five Central Asian republics is discussed, and the reader will be offered some of the puzzles and questions that have made possible the theoretical conception of the present research. While niches and ‘gaps’ will be pointed out, potential engagements with the current project will be discussed as well, and the need of the present research will be, therefore, discussed not as oppositional to the present literature on the field but actually as *complementary* and as a mutually reinforcing element.

As it might be expected, the literature on Central Asia is extremely extensive and multifaceted. It is not uncommon to find articles, books and sources addressing now the region on the whole, now single states, now some states, now non-state actors at play on the territory. However, one should bear in mind that since the ontology that constitutes the present research is a potential (regional) *inter-national* society, what is of utmost interest are the *inter-national relations* and *politics* of the region. Therefore, the strategy adopted here is that of identifying some ‘mainstreams’, some ‘sub-fields’ which this huge body of work can be sub-divided into.

In doing so, I will offer a ‘Pawsonian’ survey of the scholarship on the region, i.e. I will organically analyse the different shapes in which the material has been treated and the different approaches several authors have adopted, and identify similarities, differences, cross-references and gaps in different contexts and different patterns of research, rather than evaluating single works *per se* in an inclusionary-exclusionary logic based on a single methodology or approach (Greener 2011).

In doing this kind of review, I consider the quality of the work as important as its breadth; in other words, I seek to combine a selection of key texts on the region while simultaneously incorporating those less known, but which add breadth to our subject by addressing different issues. In sum, I combine a vertical criterion of ‘quality’ with a horizontal one of ‘breadth’. What I am about to propose is, therefore, a tripartite compartmentalisation of the literature on the region, based on the main themes found in the selecting process:

- works focused on the ‘New Great Game’ narrative, i.e. on the presence, intrusion and struggle of foreign states and often super and great powers in the region, to foster possible cooperation and more often to revitalise competition and to stimulate economic, military and resource-related frictions among each other;
- works that deal specifically with the region as a security complex, and therefore are concerned with the security dynamics that pervade the countries’ relations among themselves;
- works specifically on the international relations within the region, i.e. those works that claim to have a wide lens of analysis and that are concerned, in their intentions, with the explanations of specific phenomena and issues related to the region, such as political transformations, assessments of the leadership and power relations, environmental policies, nationalism and rediscovery of the past, economic prospects and developments, cooperation alternated to competition.

Given the predominance of the neo-realist paradigm in the wider panorama of IR Theory, we should not be surprised when realising that the first strand of the literature identified above is the most popular. However, it is our task to assess both the merit and the pitfalls of all the sections illustrated above. This will allow to recognise and consider what has been done on the one hand, and will help identify those gaps the theory used in this work seeks to plug.

The chapter will proceed as follows: after discussing the key texts according to the three specific areas identified supra, light will be shed on those issues, questions and aspects either neglected or under-treated in the literature. This will allow for the next move, that is, to explain why the present research is needed and what its potential contributions are. In the final part, a little synopsis of ES theory’s recent developments will be provided, especially to trace its path from a world-perspective to a regional one. Since this research seeks to provide answers for both the ontology and the theory used, it seems a good move to assess the evolution of the theoretical aspect as well.

A preliminary caveat before surveying the current literature on the region is that in this section I will not take into consideration works, papers or books on specific countries or bilateral relations. This is because I am more interested, also in respect to the theory I am going to apply later, in how the literature has dealt with the region itself, meant as the sum of the dynamics, linkages and issues that are present at the interstate level (i.e. among the countries in the region) and at the international level (i.e. between the countries in the region and the external environment).

By no means, should the present chapter be considered as the only *locus* of the thesis where the literature on Central Asia is discussed: while this chapter is the bulk of the literature on the subject, additional sources and materials will be addressed *passim* as well. Moreover, as this research is concerned with the application of a specific theory to the region, rather than with a single issue *per se*, great attention will be devoted to *how* the previous scholarship has dealt with it, as well as *what* it has said on it.

2.2 Central Asia as a chessboard for the New Great Game

Although '[i]t is risky to impose the clichés of a storied past upon situations in the contemporary world' (Canfield 2010: 1), the largest and the more written about strand of the literature concerning Central Asia is usually that referring to the so-called 'New Great Game', with reference to the political, geo-strategic competition played by the British and Russian Empires in the XIX century to jockey for influence in the region of khanates and tribes which now corresponds more or less to the Central Asian republics.

According to the authors whose work can be identified with this part of the literature, the region has gained importance in the wake of the 9/11 events, since '[9/11] made Central Asia the epicentre of geopolitical shocks on a global scale and redefined the geopolitical situation surrounding Central Asia' (Rumer 2002: 57). In this respect, therefore, Central Asia is nothing more than a 'battlefield' (Kleveman 2003; Kempe 2006) or, in the best case 'a chessboard and a player' (Müllerson 2007) on which Great Powers such as Russia, China and the West, mostly the US and the EU, compete for security influence, energy resources and strategic placement in confronting possible menaces springing from south-located terrorism and radical Islam.

The 'reification' of Central Asian states within such narrative is exemplified in the work of Gert Flikke and Julie Wilhelmsen (2010) according to whom the five republics are basically a *testing ground* for New Great-Power Relations, and also in the work of Yu Bin, who reflects on how the whole region 'remains the geostrategic playground of the world's major civilizations' (Bin 2006: 3) and creates a narrative where Central Asian republics are rather pawns, or better a theatre, a background, on which the tragedy of great powers is played out.

Since the strategic and competitive aspect between the powerful actors is the hallmark of this part of the literature on the region, the analysis conducted into Central Asian states in these works is therefore marginal, shallow, as they are portrayed as 'vassals' and only functional to enlighten the strategies and the moves of the greater and more powerful players (Rumer 2002; Swanström 2005; Wishnick 2009).

Furthermore, by focusing largely on strategic competition and access to energy resources and more viable routes through which the great powers can extend their needs of energy consumption and geo-political control, such literature often adopts a zero-sum, neo-realist perspective, heavily relying on mechanic power dynamics and therefore neglecting the perceptions, the views and the behaviours of the actors involved. States are treated as having exogenous, predetermined interests, and the Central Asian republics suffer from a 'theoretical uniformity' that makes them all alike in dealing with such issues while confronting the outside great powers. Rajan Menon, for example, argues that 'Central Asian governments are bound to see continued American strategic engagement in their region as a counterweight and safeguard against Russia and millenarian Islamic movements' (2003: 191).

More recently Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse have contributed to this literature from an economic perspective, even if they do not use the term 'New Great Game' (2013).

It must be said, however, that such an approach to the region, in which the great powers dominate Central Asian states, has been recently contested within the literature itself, therefore generating an informing and useful intra-literature debate. Emilian Kavalski (2012), for example, maintains that Central Asia has consistently been denied its 'subjectivity' in international life, that it has always been a 'context', spectator or victim whose agency has never been recognised; Tatiana Shackleina (2009) has recently argued that the excessive attention to the great powers instead of

to Central Asian states has generated little policy guidance for approaching those countries. Iqboljon Qoraboyev (2010) has instead argued that the New Great Game literature has overshadowed those little signs of active cooperation among Central Asian republics, and therefore major attention should be paid to the inter-state, regional dynamics. Martin and Dina Spechler (2010) and Andrei Malashenko (2010) have shown how *de facto* external powers (especially Russia), while competing for influence and leverage on the region, are seeing their radius of action limited, and therefore the Great Game narrative should not be exaggerated (see also Lieven 2000).

In addition, within this large and rather uniform body of literature, a few authors argue for a more relevant role of the Central Asian republics, thus shifting the spotlight from the relentless competition of the great powers to the strategic ability of the Central Asian republic in exploiting such rivalry. Ruth Deyermond, for example, argues that a more comprehensive analysis of Central Asian state security dynamics is required, since ‘neither the “Great Game” image of competition in Central Asia nor the literature on post-9/11 cooperation in the region’ adequately account for a crisp analytical perspective (2009: 152). David Kerr (2010) deems that the interplay of several great powers in the region can be fully understood only if we adopt the perspective of Central Asian states as well.

Yang Cheng argues as well that the New Great Game narrative has done little justice to the complexity of the intra-regional dynamics of the region, and argues for more refined theoretical works to elucidate them for the purpose of policy-making. Such claim is chiefly visible in one passage of his article, when he stresses the fact that recent political developments in the region show that ‘Central Asian countries are no longer merely the objects of great power politics but are more and more involved and participating in the management of regional affairs. The main features of Central Asian countries in the regional pattern are increasingly evident’ (Cheng 2010: 176).

To illustrate the regional dynamics among the Central Asian countries and the external powers, therefore, Cheng therefore adopts a ‘complex power structure’ model, i.e. one in which the zero-sum, neorealist competitive nature of the relations is not taken for granted but is tested on a series of issues (economic, military and cultural) and shows, through the differentiation of the issue-based power configurations, how international relations in Central Asia are characterised by a mix of multipolarity, unipolarity and bipolarity, both cooperative and oppositional.

Lastly, Alexander Cooley (2012) has shown how despite the competing

politics of Great Powers in the region and the structurally subordinate position of Central Asian states in this competition, the former have found themselves to follow rules of behaviour and compromises dictated by the latter, thus bringing the agency of Central Asian states into the Great Game picture.

In sum, notwithstanding the preponderance of the neorealist paradigm in IR and the tendency to consider the five Central Asian republics as mere parts of a wider game played by the outer great powers, a few authors have started claiming for a more refined and accurate theoretical work on the region, and have claimed to shed more and brighter light on the specific relations *between* Central Asian states. While this part of the literature has the undoubted merit of highlighting important systemic dynamics and traces the major developments at the global level, and has (quite paradoxically) contributed to revitalising the academic and policy-making environments' interests in a region which had remained overlooked for a long time, it inevitably neglects to underline the sub-systemic, intra-regional, conflictual and cooperative dynamics that characterised Central Asian states in the last years.

2.3 Central Asia as a Security Complex

The second strand of the literature concerned with Central Asia and its political landscape is that which puts the region in the context of the RSC theory as developed by Barry Buzan et al. (1998) and Barry Buzan and Ole Waever (2003). According to the theory, a RSC is defined as 'a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another' (1998: 201). Not surprisingly, due to the recent independence of the five Central Asian republics and the still-ongoing reassessment of their security relations, few works have been produced so far from a RSC viewpoint.

However, this literature points out that the New Great Game narrative is running the risk of overshadowing the security necessities and challenges that Central Asian states are facing, and therefore this literature presents a plus: it is not concerned just with international relations *on* Central Asia but it is concerned primarily with international relations *in* Central Asia, looking at their internal dynamics in the field of security.

Roy Allison and Lena Jonson (2001) have analysed the region in these terms, looking especially at the issues of terrorism, water-resources management and drug-trafficking, arguing that while a true RSC is still in formation, it is already possible to assist to strongly-linked security dynamics in two sub-RSC, one in the Caspian area between Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, and an Eastern one surrounding the Ferghana Valley, formed by Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Jason Soderblom (2004), conversely, has shown how the formation of a regional security community (i.e. a 'cooperative' RSC, one in which the states involved facing the same threat adopt the same strategies in a convergent and cooperative way) is difficult due to the disparate and often divergent interests of the states forming the complex, but also that the recent developments within the SCO may lead to the future formation of a more structured and cooperative (in an anti-US fashion) RSC.

On the same lines, Osman Yandas (2005) argues that despite being landlocked between the 'Russian Bear' and the 'Chinese Dragon' and the difficulties spurring from clashing interests between the great (the US, Russia, China) and the regional (Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) powers, the five Central Asian states have started forming a more structured RSC under the shadow of the SCO, especially as far as militant Islam and energy security are concerned, and that this RSC can help shed light on the unique characteristics of the region (see also Lanteigne 2006 and Ambrosio 2008).

Other authors are more sceptical on the prospects for the formation of a RSC in Central Asia. Local analysts such as Rustam Burnashev and Irina Chernykh, for example, maintain that despite geographical proximity and shared security problems, Central Asian states have so far failed to adopt a 'regional' view on menaces such as Islamic terrorism and border conflicts, adopting bilateral strategies at best and individual strategies at worst (Burnashev undated; Burnashev 2002; Chernykh and Burnashev 2005).

Two issues arise from this kind of literature. The first one is that, by looking at Central Asian international relations in terms of security and RSC theory, these authors have certainly expanded the theoretical understanding of the region, which had been limited to neorealist accounts of international relations in the new great game narrative. The methodological aspect is also enhanced. Moving from an exogenous account of states' interests formation, these works inquire into the

formation of such interests, on the multifacetedness of the relations between regional and supra-regional states and the several responses different threats require, thus adopting a constructivist, more interpretivist methodology well in line with RSC theory (see Buzan and Waever 2003: 40).

The second one, conversely, is that while such works, by virtue of their focus and research assumptions, only focus on security concerns, they nonetheless add a wider understanding of regional international relations, addressing issues such as 'security community' and 'security cooperation' in relation to the values, norms and commonality of intents of all the actors involved in the complex, from the regional to the international level.

This more expanded view of Central Asian international relations made possible by the adoption of the RSC theory allows us, as will be shown later, to speculate and conduct research on a complex theoretical link, i.e. on the hypothetical, binomial relations that exists between a RSC and a regional international society, a very much understudied topic in huge need of further research (Lanteigne 2006; Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009, Aris 2010).

As it is evident, the RSC has brought forward the previous focus of the literature both in ontological (focus on the Central Asian relations) and epistemological (expansion of the available theoretical devices incorporating non-neorealist approaches) terms. As has been said, however, due to its focus on security relations, a larger account of Central Asian normative relations is still lacking, and this is the task that the authors working in the third strand of the literature have sought to accomplish.

2.4 The International Relations of Central Asia

Compared to the previous two strands of the literature, the literature on Central Asia as a region, with its own peculiarities, specificities and dynamics, has proved to be more multifaceted and far more sensitive to considering the five Central Asian republics as dynamic political actors rather than mere parts of a greater game or parts of a regional security complex. Yet, we should not be surprised by the fact that this third strand of the literature is perhaps the least developed and the most recent, given the fact that 'what is most important in independent Central Asia is domestic development, not international relations' (Mandelbaum 1994: 16).

In this part of the literature, the *nature* of the relations among the five Central Asian states is probably the most treated and debated issue. In economic, territorial and political terms, especially as far as water- and border-management are concerned, that international relations among Central Asian states are competitive seems to be the predominant idea. Johannes Linn, for example, speaks of a ‘disintegration scenario’, arguing that ‘Central Asian countries and their partner states do not build bridges among themselves and between their conflicting short-term and shared long-term interests’ (2007: 10), while Annette Bohr, pointing at competitive behaviours between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in terms of regional hegemony and between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in terms of energy resources management, asserts that there are huge ‘practical and political constraints impeding regional cooperation’ (Bohr 2004: 494).

Eugene Rumer has stressed the low salience of market integration in the region, and how the overlaps of resources traded by the five Central Asian states hinder the prospects for a deeper economic integration (2000) while Allison, while recognising the superficial eagerness of Central Asian states in joining regional and extra-regional forms of cooperation, has argued that such initiatives are nothing but a way to embolden and entrench their sovereign power and internal stability, thus benefiting from a ‘protective integration’ through a ‘virtual regionalism’ (2008).

Sally Cummings seems to take the same line when asserting that ‘[r]egime preservation has encouraged the pursuit of state interests but has primarily discouraged the pooling of sovereignty out of fear that an outside power will encroach upon their policy-making’ (2012: 179), while Martin Spechler (2001) has doomed Central Asia as ‘pathologically’ non-cooperative.

However, several authors have recently made a case for analysing more in depth the pale, but nonetheless present, hints of cooperation. Martha Brill Olcott, for example, while being sceptical of advanced cooperation among Central Asian countries (2001), a few years later admitted that ‘[d]espite all the speeches of leaders of Central Asia on the bellicosity of their peoples, in the early years of independence competition in the region generally proceeded in a peaceful way’ (2005: 32-33), while Mirzokhid Rahimov allows for a possible developing trend in the management of Central Asian international relations (2007).

Alexander Libman and Evgeny Vinokurov, while conceding that cooperation among Central Asian states has largely remain unsuccessful and rather competitive (see among others Akiner 2007; Pomfret 2009, Torjesen 2008), deem that the

prospects for closer collaboration, especially in the economic field, should not be entirely dismissed, especially in the light of the rise of Kazakhstan (2011).

Olcott has maintained that, despite the largely uncooperative character of the region, there is much credit to the argument that CA states have managed to avoid collapse, even with the civil war in Tajikistan, and that the kinship substratum binding the five states has created a stark contrast with far more bellicose regional clusters such as the Caucasus (2005: 20-26).

Spechler and Spechler have been ‘most impress[ed]’ by how latent conflicts in the region have been managed successfully (i.e. without interstate war), and have claimed that while ‘some issues remain [...] they do not seem likely to lead to serious use of force’ (2010: 168). Yet, all fail to ask themselves *why* this has been the case.

More recently, again, Olcott (2011) has made a case to carefully consider prospects for both conflict and cooperation, and to develop new frameworks to assess such conflicting, but ongoing, dynamics. While conceding that Central Asian states ‘less frequently have contact with one another’ (2011: 18), she also stresses the fact that ‘regional competitions will not become the basis of armed conflict in the future’ and that while ‘[t]here is certainly cause for pessimism, [...] there is also reason for hope (2011: 35)’.

In addition, while competition and distrust seem to be the common narrative, the author points out at several hints of cooperation, or at least of initial dialogue, and prospects for enhanced cooperation, especially in the political and economic fields; the fact that such states are diversifying their strategies and compete on several grounds ‘is an entirely normal process and should not surprise no one’ (2011: 34). There are in sum prospects of change in the future, and the relational pattern of Central Asian states is increasingly gaining in importance especially since it ‘join[s] these countries with the global swath of the global community’ (2011: 34).

In the light of these accounts, therefore, it seems that the experiences of the Central Asian Commonwealth (1991-1994), the Central Asian Economic Union (1994-1998), the Central Asian Economic Cooperation (1998-2002) and the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (2002-2005), plus the establishment, via a legally binding international treaty, of a Central Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (CANWFZ) in 2006 and the agreement reached by the five Central Asian governments to establish a UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Ashgabat (UNRCCA) in 2007 are concrete examples of an at least nominal

convergence of interests which, *independently from their success*, reveal a common normative substratum on certain issues that is in the need of better and deeper investigation. As a matter of fact, here it is argued that it is inaccurate, to say the least, to dismiss failed examples of cooperation as proof of an inability to integrate, but quite the contrary these examples show the need to investigate the reasons *why* these states decided to try to cooperate and the norms and institutions underpinning such projects.

This continuous and mutually reinforcing debate between cooperation and competition/rivalry is, in fact, well-portrayed also in the RSC literature: Allison, for example, has argued that '[d]eep-rooted tensions in the Central Asian regional complex [...] have been identified. However, cooperative dynamics have also developed in parallel in the region, resulting in the creation of a variety of interstate structures, frameworks and forums' (2001: 219) and that '[t]hese structures promote Central Asian regional cooperation and reflect an effort to reach consensus on matter of principal concern to the local states. However, local rivalries and imbalances between these states continue to hinder such efforts' (2001: 219-220).

Stuart Horsman, when dealing with the delicate issue of water resources in Central Asia, asserts that '[tensions] have been recorded, but it is unlikely that such incidents will escalate into interstate conflict' (2001: 77), while Allison again points out that '[in Central Asia] some coordination in countering growing low-intensity and non-traditional threats has developed and it is likely to continue' (2001: 226).

In sum, competition and incipient cooperation, poor relations but also examples of dialogue: while some authors have identified the cause of such 'swinging stability of affairs' in the presence of the foreign powers (Lantaigne 2006), the shared concern for the protection of sovereignty (Cummings 2012) or a more general sense of order (Kavalski 2010, Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013) none of the theoretical accounts used so far to analyse Central Asian relations, i.e. neo-realism, RSC Theory, neo-liberalism and post-colonial theory, has proved to be completely satisfactory both from a descriptive and an explanatory point of view (Cummings 2012).

This continuous balance between bitter interstate rivalry and absence of severe conflicts (at least involving two or more actors), between the lack of substantive cooperation and the several attempts to foster common strategies and basic prospects for further collective efforts in dealing with transnational issues and security concerns shows that neorealism and neoliberalism, while certainly useful theoretical devices,

are ‘grossly incomplete’ (Finnemore 1996: 27) to analyse the present state of affairs between Central Asian states. It seems that an intermediate approach would be more valuable, especially given the fact that this ‘regional uncertainty’ in structuring their international relations may indicate that all Central Asian states are to a certain extent working and dealing with each other in the respect of common institution and expectations, norms and codes of conduct which, even if not hindering what seems to be an embedded and deeply rooted competitive realm, nonetheless make possible the prevention of wider, disruptive conflicts, the maintenance of their sovereignty and ‘stateness’ and the usual game of politics not only among the Central Asian states but also between them and the external powers.

In other words, it does not seem too unlikely that in Central Asia, despite the chronic problems of state-building, security management and of counter-measuring transnational menaces, there are hints of an international society in formation, albeit a ‘coexistential’, pluralist one, made up of the incorporation of the institutions of the wider international society and supported, possibly, by regional and local institutions (again, worth stressing, meant as shared codes of conduct and accepted norms more than organisations or policy-making architectures).

Another way to look at relations between Central Asian states is to look at relations between *regimes* and *forms of states*. One of the least treated issues in ES theorisation, and even more so in the specific sub-literature on international societies at the regional level, is how the nature of the state influences the character of the international society under examination. This theoretical neglect, which I consider borrowed from neorealism (see e.g. Buzan 1993), characteristic of the first generation of ES scholars (Bull 1977, Wight 1977) and prone to over-structural readings of international relations, is deplorable especially given the regional turn of the School in the last year.

Assuming that ‘the state’ is an idealtypical construct with no differentiation in terms of cohesiveness, consolidation, openness, resilience, social composition, value-based political institutions represents a huge conceptual and empirical ‘miss’ for the English School in terms of comparing international societies across the globe. It is in fact puzzling that while the nature of the state has been taken into consideration in studying regional security complexes (Buzan and Waever 2003: 20-24) it has never been treated in international society theory. In one of the very few analyses of how the nature of the state influences regional international societies, Mohammed Ayoob has

stressed that, especially in postcolonial contexts, ‘the premise that regional states are unitary, rational actors that engage in interstate relations to advance their ‘national’ interest is drastically undermined’ (1999:250). In such areas, states may not be able to defend their borders properly, or contain ethnic grievances, or project power in an effective way, or simply may not be able to address social and economic crisis (see also, in a ‘strong/weak’ states framework, Migdal 1994; McMann 2004). All this has logically an impact on relations with neighbours: ‘the dynamics of regional balances and the prospects for the construction of regional societies, therefore become inextricably intertwined with the essentially domestic enterprise of state making and nation building, thus holding regional dynamics and structures hostage to the internal processes of contiguous and proximate states’ (1999: 251). In sum, regional international society seems dependent on the nature of the state.

By ‘nature of the state’ it is meant the complex set of relations between form of government (monarchy, republic), form of regime (autocracy, democracy, dictatorship), economic system (open, closed economy), institutional background (strong/weak institutions of government) and social environment (free society, closed society, repressed society) that characterise the political life of a given state. With specific respect to international society theory, it may be argued that, while foundational institutions (such as non-intervention and sovereignty) and some procedural institutions may be developed between very different states for needs of order and predictability to consolidate regimes (one may think of diplomacy and positivist, state-centric international law), other procedural institutions may be easier to develop between more liberal, open states than others (e.g. the market, human rights).

Considering Central Asia, and with specific respect to the regime type present there, there is unanimous consensus in the literature that the nature of the state is, albeit in different degrees between regional states, neo-patrimonial, i.e. a form of state where the ruling elite considers the state and its institutions as sources of benefits and enrichment rather than as an independent set of relations to be managed in the interest of the people in a more Weberian sense, and where unaccountability and secretive negotiations, rather than accountability and openness, characterise the political game and how power is shared (Markowitz 2013, Lewis 2010, Lewis 2012b, Heathershaw

2014, Anceschi 2010, Collins 2006, Kreikemeyer 2013, Axyonova 2013).⁵ In the words of Kathleen Collins, neopatrimonialism is a ‘modern form of politics organised around hierarchical and personalistic networks that are typically informal, non-transparent, exclusivist and generally non-institutionalised’ (2009: 254 fn. 7). Patrimonialism is actually an entire system of authoritarian rule defined ‘by a concentration of power in a personalistic leader and his ties, rather than formal institutions and legality’ (2009: 255).

If this is the case, then one may expect consequences for international society as regime types have an impact on how ‘the international’ is performed (one of the most recent discussion on this in the ES literature is Alice Ba’s analysis of East Asia [2015]). As a matter of fact, Luca Anceschi has convincingly shown (2010: 153-154) how foreign policy and international relations in Central Asia are based on the inextricable nexus between regime maintenance, regime survival, pre-eminence of domestic factors and regime interests. Consequently, the international society present there will feature a triangular relationship between nation building, foreign policy and regime consolidation (2010: 144).

What would this international society look like, taking into account the patrimonial nature of the regimes? First, authority (*avtoritet*) order and stability (*stabil’nost*) will be prioritised over change and regime evolution (specifically if liberal in nature) (Heathershaw 2006). Speaking of the nexus between state capacity, regime and foreign policies, the well-known political scientist Aidos Sarym told me that ‘authoritarian governments are bad, but we have to take into consideration the capacity of the region as a whole, because the region itself is limited in its political capacity. And I personally travel a lot in Kyrgyzstan, I meet with experts, colleagues and politologists there and they all dream of a dictator to keep order!’⁶

Second, regime-to-regime relations will prevail over 1) state-to-state relations (with the possible development of inter-presidentialism as an institution of the regional context, like in Latin America) and 2) genuine ‘state’ interests. This is even more evident since, in the course of fieldwork, several interviewees acknowledged

5 With respect to Kyrgyzstan, this may be less true after the establishment of a parliamentary form of government in 2010. Yet, neopatrimonial dynamics were observable under both Akayev and Bakiyev in the previous years.

6 Interview with Aidos Sarym, Political Risk Assessment Group, Almaty, Kazakhstan, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 17 November 2013.

that ‘the state’, in Central Asia, is a shortcut for ‘the president’.⁷ With respect to the institutions of diplomacy, and in tune with the findings of this thesis, Kreykemeyer has recently stated that ‘in accord with the primacy of the informal, and to maintain the status quo of maximum control, the Central Asian states frame their foreign and security policies largely in informal ways and mostly on a bilateral basis’ (2013: 174).

Third, institutions related to the economy (the market and borders) may be underdeveloped and restricted to favour personal gains of the ruling elite (Collins 2009: 264). As one of my interviewees stated, ‘In this context, things are managed in the way that it is profitable, convenient for the incumbent government’.⁸

Fourth, one may expect degrees of competition between the elites when conflicting interests arise over possible sources of revenue (water and borders in the case of Central Asia) but also a sort of ‘autocratic solidarity’, an ‘elitist solidarism’ between them when domestic forces, pushing for liberalisation and/or regime change, pose dangers. One of my interviewees expressed this ‘top-down’ conception of international society very insightfully: ‘If you ask me about the pattern of international relations in Central Asia, the pattern in Central Asia is strong leadership. Strong leadership, mutual recognition, stability, and sovereignty. These represent the uniqueness of Central Asia, especially strong leadership... A bona fide rule we have [in the region] is that despite our distrust, grievances, etc. we do support each other in the domestic sphere, when there are domestic problems’⁹.

If this is the case, then we should expect the birth of a regional international society structured around a paradoxical, conflicting logic: legal/political pluralism (emphasis on sovereignty, territoriality, borders, diplomacy and state-centric international law) and regime solidarity, mutual (tacit) support against common threats, authoritarianism as ‘the norm’ in the region to preserve political power, development of personal ties and presence of shared values and priorities at the individual, personal level).

Fifthly and lastly, a society of neopatrimonial states will be likely to balance

7 For example, interview with Dosym Satpaev, Political Risk Assessment Group, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 18 November 2013; interview with Irina Chernykh, expert in Kazakhstan, 14 November 2013; interview with Shairbek Juraev, independent analyst, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 28 November 2013; interview with Nuria Kutnaeva, independent expert and analyst, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 3 December 2013.

8 Interview with Bermet Tursunkulova, Vice-President of Academic Affairs and Professor of International Relations, AUCA, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 27 November 2013.

9 Interview with Official Uzbek source, location undisclosed, 12 February 2014.

different great powers to profit from cooperation with them, and therefore multivectoralism and ‘management of great powers’ should be expected (in Kreykemeier’s words, ‘balancing for profit’). Overall, we are likely to speak of an ‘ideology-driven’ form of international society. In this respect, John Heathershaw speaks of ‘neo-sovietism’, meant as the activity of imagining Central Asia and its perceived values ‘in ideological terms – having a particular and objective reality expressed in dominant beliefs, doctrines and rituals’ (2006: 8, fn. 39). In the words of an interviewee, ‘cooling down conflicts and keeping stability is what actually presidential power is about in Central Asia: to avoid any conflict both within and outside and to allow stabilisation of other presidential powers, stabilisation for other presidential regimes, you know, they have so much interest in preserving the status quo’.¹⁰ As another interviewee working on international politics in the region argued, ‘Nobody will fight authoritarian regimes in the region, and also Russia will support authoritarian regimes. This is what I meant [in the course of the interview] by non-intervention. All countries want stability, and especially stability in foreign affairs. This is why they sustain each other’.¹¹

This, in sum, requires a re-conceptualisation, or in Acharya’s term, a localisation of the usual IR lexicon concerned with ‘state interests’ and ‘state-security’. When ‘interests’ and ‘security’ are mentioned, these are usually referred implicitly to the regimes. Conversely, when leaders speak of ‘the state’, they speak of a subject of international law, not a set of social relations between the government and the people. As Wilson has pointed out, the ‘state’ in Central Asia is purely epiphenomenal or instrumental, a vehicle for keeping hold of power or brokering international agreements. Beyond this virtual state lies an inner or real state-system found in the informal institutions, networks, and material instantiations of power of ruling regimes (Wilson 2005, in Heathershaw 47).¹²

The implications of this theoretical discussion on the link between

10 Interview with Zhenis Kembayev, Professor of International Law, KIMEP University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 15 November 2013.

11 Interview with Zakir Chotaev, Assistant Director at the Central Asian Research Centre - Turkish Kyrgyz Manas University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 3 December, 2013.

12 Yet, Heathershaw warns us to not dismiss the state entirely: ‘Dismissing Central Asian states as quantitatively weak is to disregard the performative processes by which they are qualitatively transformed to become globalised polities with relatively strong executives. Equally, to consider these states as captured by clans, regional factions, or other nationally confined networks misses the importance of the state form as the medium for global, national and local relations’ (2014: 49).

neopatrimonial regimes and the structure of the regional international society will be discussed again in the course of the thesis, with specific analysis in Chapter 4.8, where the position of Kyrgyzstan in this regional international society will be considered.

2.5 Relations with the outside world

The literature on Central Asia has been so far discussed in relation to three main strands, that of the narrative of the great game, that of the region as a regional security complex and that of the specific international relations within the region itself. However, an important part of this last strand of the literature has also devoted its attention not just to the international politics of cooperation/competition among the five Central Asian states, but has also looked, at least preliminarily, at how these states manage their relations with the wider international community, at how they fit within the normative framework of the international society at the global level and how they relate themselves with international institutions and political bodies, and how they conceive of the norms and ideas that permeate the normative architecture of world politics.

For example, Kavalski, *contra* those who argue for the isolation and political backwardness of the five republics, reminds us of how ‘the post-Soviet Central Asian republics tried to form new bilateral and multilateral relations. Within a short time, the Central Asia nations were formally recognized by many countries and established with most of them diplomatic ties and exchanged diplomatic missions’ (2010: 309). In addition, both Jones Luong (2002; 2004) and Erica Weinthal (2002; 2004) argue that Central Asian states, albeit in different manners to different extents have aimed at gaining legitimisation and inclusion within international society, looking for the approval of the international community in terms of external statehood and internal structures, such as institutions and electoral procedures. The recent comparative work of Sally Cummings and Raymond Hinnebusch (2011) is another welcome contribution to how the norm of sovereignty has been adopted by the Central Asian republics, although how sovereignty is played out in the region is not addressed, not to mention the other institutions of international society.

On a more careful and doubtful tone, some authors question the complete adherence of the five Central Asian republics to the normative, Western apparatus of

international norms, and argue that a closer analysis to understand how these countries relate to this normative framework is needed.

Christopher Waters, for example, when inquiring on the relations between human rights norms and Central Asian performance, asks clearly: 'Do the cultures of [Central Asia] have different understandings of rights than the 'Western'-formulated rights found in international treaties?' (2009: 199); Alexander Warkotsch (2007) has been one of the first to analyse the process of socialisation between Central Asian states and the Western international society, both from a rationalist and a reflexive viewpoint, but only as far as the concept of 'democracy' is concerned; Kavalski (2010) has analysed the issue of sovereignty and statehood in Central Asia through the lenses of socialisation theory, borrowed from Hedley Bull (1977) and Amitav Acharya (2004).

An important contribution in this field of the literature is that of Irina Liczek and Jens Wandel (2009), who have also aimed at expanding the understanding of socialisation of international norms in Central Asia. While their study is limited to gender inequality and only two countries, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, it nonetheless addresses a very important point for this thesis, namely how Central Asian states relate to the international community and how we should understand such a process.

Relying on previous constructivist ideas and methods (Finnemore 1996; Keck and Sikkink 1998), their work brings in a double movement, from the wider international society (above) and the pre-existing social texture, Soviet and pre-Soviet, from below: the internationalisation of norms, and therefore of other institutions, goes through a complex process of acceptance and re-interpretation under cultural and social peculiarities that somehow bring change to the norm at the international level (Acharya 2011).

As can be seen, the issue of linking Central Asia to the concept (and perhaps, more importantly, to the practices) of international society has been dealt with in the literature, but only selectively and not entirely satisfactorily. Firstly, how the institutions and norms of international society, to which all Central Asian states claim to adhere, have been translated, modified and re-conceptualised in their own region, remains largely underexplored. The works mentioned above, due to their limited scope and focus, have addressed only the concepts of statehood, democracy and (certain) human rights in some countries, thus without presenting a comprehensive

framework to *regionally* assess the legitimacy and the (re)-interpretation of the *whole bundle* of international norms and institutions.

Moreover, while the impact of international norms and actors has been studied from the perspective and the influence-side of external regulatory bodies and institutions, or from the viewpoint of the outer international community, little has been said from the perspective of the states enmeshed in such process of socialisation, therefore preventing the disclosure of a (forming) regional international society possibly based on different understandings of the international norms (Neumann 2011).

2.6 How are Central Asian states seen on the world stage?

At the beginning of this chapter, it was said that not only would an account of *what* the literature has said on Central Asia be given, but that a *detour* on *how* the region has been seen in most of the works produced so far would also be offered. In this way, it is possible to identify the theoretical shortcomings of such works, and to locate the present research in a better-defined niche in which it can be more usefully exploited.

At a very general level, it must be said that the literature on Central Asia has not been benign towards it. Due to its landlocked position in the inner part of the Eurasian continent, its postcolonial status and very recent experience of state-building, the five states forming the region have been considered ‘romantic, dangerous and arcane’ (Cummings 2012: 1), far from our common understanding of international politics and a location prone to chaos (Rashid 2008), instability, disorder and unpredictability.

Jones Luong has spoken of Central Asia as a region commonly located at the periphery, at the margins of IR (2002); in the same year Rumer spoke of the ongoing political developments in Central Asia as a ‘gathering storm’ while Menon (2003: 189), in assessing the domestic and regional politics of the five states, argues that ‘Central Asia is a region of instability and ubiquitous corruption’ and Kavalski shows how Central Asia has been almost always eponymous with ‘otherness’ in Western literature (2012; see also Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013 who speak of a persistent ‘peripheral status’ of Central Asia in world politics).

However, in recent years, a few authors have begun to contest this common portrayal of Central Asian politics. Kavalski, for example, proposes the overcoming of

the ‘clichéd imagery of “land of discord”’ and ‘the disparate and anarchic theatre of global geopolitics’ (2010: 3), deeming that in reality these five republics are quite different from being ‘backward, violent and fatalistic’ (2010: 7), whereas Olivier Roy, in a more colourful way, argues that ‘these new states [of Central Asia] are far from banana republics’ (2000: 200).

Moreover, John Heathershaw and Nick Megoran (2011), by analysing the narratives of different Western studies, papers, books and reports on the region, have concluded that much of the scholarship produced on Central Asia is biased, due to a *preconception* of it as a ‘dangerous place’, ‘obscure’, ‘oriental and Afghanistan-prone’ and ‘fractious’ (2011: 594-604). While the authors agree that ‘representations of Central Asia as dangerous are important [since] they are not just superficial reflections or distortions of deeper realities, but part of those realities’ (Heathershaw and Megoran 2011: 605), we should nonetheless try to challenge such hegemonic, dominating discourses, by adopting different methodologies, by telling different stories and by focusing on different issues ‘to read and write Central Asia’s place in global politics differently’ (2011: 612; see also Milliken 1999: 244-245).

Furthermore, by looking at statehood-resilience, Cummings argues against such narratives as well, claiming that, especially in terms of state capacity, the five Central Asian states perform better than some of their African counterparts, and that if one makes an exception for Tajikistan (1992-1997), Uzbekistan (2005) and Kyrgyzstan (Cummings 2002, Temirkulov 2010), ‘Central Asia [contra the common narrative] have been relatively more stable than comparable post-colonial countries in the immediate aftermath of imperial collapse’ (Cummings 2012: 6; see also, with specific reference to Tajikistan, Heathershaw 2008).

What this treatment of the region reveals is an entrenched, accepted narrative according to which Central Asian states are somehow excluded from the basic normative machinery of world politics, are somehow ‘pre-modern’ in their development and intractable with the usual categories of the discipline of IR. While such narratives, as we have seen, have been contested and counter-argued, there is still the need for a more sophisticated analysis of how, and in what measure these states *do* fit with the general normative template of international politics present at the global level, and of asking to what extent their differences in practices and conduct (the negative connotations described above) are, on the contrary, expressions of their own regional institutionalisation and socialisation.

2.7 A tour of the ES

It must be immediately said that this section will not deal with the specificities, the canons and the features of the ES and its evolution, but is primarily concerned with the written works within the theoretical body, to show what the production under such framework has been so far. Therefore, the purpose of this section is twofold. On the one hand, it aims not so much to analyse every single work done within the ES framework, but rather to give an overview on how this theory has been dealt with and applied in the wider academic realm. On the other hand, following the pattern of the previous section, it serves to identify a niche, a gap, or an underdevelopment in its theoretical contribution to the study of IR.

Since its first depictions (Bull 1977, Wight 1977), the ES has been concerned with the description of both the nature and the working of the so called ‘institutions’ in regulating the pervasive conflictual nature of international politics in those years.

Subsequently, the concept of international society was deepened and put in an expansion-contraction dynamic, thus giving birth to the ‘expansion of international society’ narrative (Bull and Watson 1984). Simultaneously, and for a long period of time, the ES started to deal with the rising issue of human rights (Vincent 1987; Wheeler 2003), thus adopting the categories of ‘pluralism’ and ‘solidarism’ which were to shape the intra-theoretical debate for the decade to come, while in the early 2000s there was a theoretical refinement and systematisation of the analytical categories used by the theory.

This systematisation was made possible by the work of Buzan (2004), Bellamy (2005) and Navari (2009). The first helped clarify certain terms (such as ‘international system’, ‘pluralism’, ‘solidarism’), better-specified the nature and the characteristics of the concept of international society and expanded the notion of ‘institution’ dividing them, for a better analytical sharpness, in primary and secondary. The second addressed many important criticisms and responded to several questions that the previous authors had left unanswered. The third dipped into one of the most contested areas of the theory, that is, its methods and methodology, two terms very much underdeveloped and controversial in the ES (for a sharp critique of ES methodology, see for example Finnemore 2001).

The last years have seen an innovative turn in the production of the ES. In line with Ayoob (1999), Buzan (2004) and Hurrell’s (2007) suggestions, it has detached

itself from the analysis of international society institutions at the global level to devote itself to the study of established or ‘in formation’ regional international societies. Yet, while this work is ground-breaking both in its aims and in its challenges to face, it has been so far little developed, as noted in the previous chapter.

Two issues arise here: the first one is ‘geographical’, while the second one is methodological. As far as the first one is concerned, while other regions have been and are being covered by this recent use of the theory, such as Latin America and East Asia (Merke 2011, Buzan and Zhang 2014a), it is evident that similar work is to be done for the post-Soviet regional space, in particular in those regional clusters such as the Caucasus and Central Asia. This seems quite astonishing, since alongside the Balkan states, they may be regarded as the newest product of the last wave of ‘decolonisation’, or better of the collapse of a former federal super-structure. Even in Buzan’s and Zhang’s book on East Asia, the latest product of regional ES, the literature review ignores the lack of any systematic ES analysis of the post-Soviet space (Buzan and Zhang 2014: 1-8).

The only exception is the very recent work of Georgeta Pourchot and Yannis Stivachtis (2014), which describes the CIS as a regional international society. While this article is a very much welcome contribution, it presents two main shortcomings. The first one is the unusual and loose geographical scope of inquiry, as they define ‘Central Asia’ as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, thus conflating different sub-complexes, histories and political as well as institutional realities. The second one is that, due to space constraints, the authors cannot develop a thick, deep and solid analysis of how norms and institutions work and are interpreted in the region, limiting themselves at observation and use of secondary sources.

As far as the methodological issue is concerned, instead, the work carried out so far on the ES on a regional basis is lacking a rigorous methodology in assessing the degree to which the states forming the region have recognised and share the validity and the meaning of the institutions binding them.

In Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pealez’s work, for example, there is no discussion on how the authors have linked the states under investigation to the institutions of global international society, and the possibility for them to share or not share a given norm or code of conduct is treated in a descriptive, intuitive manner. This, in fairness, is considered a puzzle by the authors themselves (see Buzan 2009: 43). When

discussing the institution of territoriality, for example, Gonzalez-Pelaez argues that ‘there is a general acceptance of this global institution’ (2009: 98), but how this acceptance is manifested or conveyed to observation is not specified.

The same methodological problems are visible in the works of Latin America and East Asia: the main sources for these projects come from secondary literature, and words from the region, collected either via fieldwork or in other qualitative ways, are seldom present. This, of course, is due to the novelty of the project, to the difficulty of applying a theory on a new ontology and to the limited scope of the work. However, this can be seen also as a challenge, or even the main challenge, for this research, and presents questions and puzzles that this work seeks to answer and solve through more rigorous methods and more specified techniques.

2.8 What niche(s) for this research?

Now that the main strands of the literature have been presented, analysed and contested, and that a short account of the historical development of the theory has been provided, it is time to sum up the major findings this survey has brought to the surface. From the review above, it is clear that the following concerns have not been addressed by the present-day literature:

- Despite the fact that it has been recognised that Central Asian states were ‘catapulted to independence’ (Olcott 1992), their process of joining the international arena has been surprisingly neglected: how, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, did these countries manage to access the international community? How did and do they incorporate norms, institutions and codes of conduct? How are they now dealing with such prescriptions? How are global norms seen from a regional perspective? How have the historical-political inheritance(s) of such countries affected their international relations? Are these understandings sufficiently common to allow us to speak of a regional international society?
- The prevalence of the neo-realist paradigm adopted to explain and depict the international dynamics of the so called ‘New Great Game’ has created the lack

of sound theoretical work on the region. Amanda Wooden and Christoph Stefes show their concern when saying that we currently miss ‘the connection between rigorous theoretical work and applied political or policy analysis. Often these two approaches are treated as separate and distinct. [...] [T]his demonstrates a general failing in our field to communicate complex thoughts [...] to other scholars and students as well as to decision-makers in need of greater regional understanding’ (2009: xiii);

- The conflict-cooperation debate, while certainly useful to understand the complexity and the multifaceted relational dynamics within the region, has failed to fully understand *why* they are both so consistently present, and *why* such constant competition, which is certainly higher than cooperation, has not led to inter-state conflict or major clashes among the five Central Asian republics. Moreover, such a bipolar and clear-cut approach to intraregional relations does not do justice to the various configurations that such ties and bonds can take, sometimes conflicting, sometimes overlapping, always coexisting, never apart;
- From a theoretical perspective, we have seen in the review of the theory that the ES has been seldom applied to the regional level and, where it has been, or is being applied, it is to regions in which the Western presence has been significant, and with a rather descriptive methodology. There is therefore the need to verify its multi-applicability and theoretical soundness, and with possible norms and institutions shared in different context but nonetheless equally legitimate: as Neumann has recently pointed out ‘international society’s norms and practices are variously anchored throughout the system’ (2011: 467);
- Still within the ES realm, it seems that there is the need to expand and complete the regional agenda recently inaugurated. For example, Buzan and Zhang have recently complained about the fact that ‘there have as yet been insufficient studies of modern regional international societies to enable either a full global sketch or any systematic comparison’ (2014a: 13), and have

affirmed that ‘we still need more studies of the regional level in order to compose a fuller picture of what is out there, and [...] the approach through primary institutions provides a powerful method for doing this kind of work’ (2014: 223). Therefore, this thesis directly addresses their concerns expanding the scope of the regional agenda of the ES, contributes to our understanding of a sociology of international relations and provides new ground for future comparative studies across regional international societies, focusing on *similarities* as well as *differentiations* between them;

- The literature on Central Asia as a (potential) RSC has shown how scholarship on Central Asia needs to better understand the ‘social dynamics’ of these countries, and not just those linked to their security concerns (although the two can be possibly linked, as the RSC theory prescribes). Moreover, recent works on Central Asia as a RSC have pointed at the possible ‘communitisation’ of the regional space under a Shanghai Spirit (Lanteigne 2006, Ambrosio 2008), therefore urging an inquiry on the relationship between RSC theory and the concept of regional international society;
- The literature on the place of Central Asia within international society, as shown, oscillates between considering it at the very margins of the world community of states to interpreting its membership in various international organisations as a clear sign of its entrenchment within the global normative framework. A clear analysis of its place within international society and the consideration of an incipient regional international society in the making among the five republics, therefore, is not only of interest from a theoretical and academic perspective, as expanding our understanding on the region and providing a new framework for analysis, but also, from a policy-making viewpoint, clarifying the practices and the values that underpin such hypothetical regional cluster of norms and institutions.

The questions and puzzles identified above should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as different facets of the bigger conundrum, i.e. whether Central Asia is assisting in the formation of a regional international society.

To conclude, this trip through the literature on Central Asia has shown that, while it is certainly true that there is a plurality of ideas, voices, opinions and perspectives, the scholarly community, as well as those interested in the region, are still in the need of answers to particularly relevant questions if they are to historically and politically understand *in toto* both the international relations and the intra-regional relations of Central Asia. Key facts, both theoretical and practical, remain under-explored and in the need of a new perspective.

The purpose of this chapter has been that of setting out these questions and puzzles through a comprehensive survey of the most recent literature on the region and on the approach of IR to the region. The next one, may be considered the keystone of the whole work, as it is devoted to the creation and the explanation of the theoretical framework of this research.

Chapter 3

Theory and methodology: when concepts matter

This chapter offers a conceptual map, whose primary scope is to clarify the terms and the ideas that will inform the whole research. In order to perform this task in a satisfactory way, however, the main puzzles of the present work must be recalled: is an international society present in Central Asia? If yes, how does it relate to that present at the global level? Is it pluralist or solidarist? And are there specific norms and institutions different from those at the global level?

From the four questions above, one may identify a few key terms, which may be said to constitute the pillars of the whole architecture of the present research: regional international society Central Asia, global level, pluralist and solidarist character, norms and institutions. It is important to stress the fact that these terms, or concepts, have not been chosen for explanation arbitrarily by the writer, but have in fact been selected due to their wide misunderstanding in the IR literature (Jones 1981; Finnemore 2001; Buzan 2004; Bellamy 2005; Qoraboyev 2010; Cummings 2012). Therefore, their clarification, refinement and careful conceptualisation, in addition to their justified use, are of utmost importance if the work is to be understood in proper terms, without falling into the trap of misjudging it just for the misuse or misinterpretation of its conceptual, theoretical and methodological premises.

Sound theory is sound explanation, and sound explanation is sound understanding. To understand well a term, a concept, or a particular expression, especially when it constitutes the red thread of a work like the present one, ensures not only internal consistency, but also external validity. It is like holding a compass: only if we know what the four letters mean and the direction whereto they point are we able to safely find our way through what may constitute for us an unknown, unexplored place. And, given the novelty of the present work, the metaphor seems indeed suitable.

The structure of this chapter, which from the discussion above may be said to constitute the taxonomical keystone of the research, is the following: it will be divided in three sections, where the first one deals with the concepts inherent to the theory used, that of the ES. Such concepts have generated much confusion within the IR literature (Buzan 2004), and therefore the purpose of such subsection is that of

avoiding wrong uses of them, and to contest the notion that they have acquired an ‘anything goes’ meaning. Especially with respect to the concept of ‘international society’, one should bear in mind that its meaning is so widely misunderstood that to use it means, essentially, to play with fire (Jackson 2010). Therefore, if, as Wittgenstein warns, meaning is use, then showing how these concepts are used and are applied is a necessary step to understand the meaning of such terms and, consequently, the wider significance of the present research.

The second section, conversely, inquires as to the significance of ‘Central Asia’, and its ‘regionness’: what do we mean by Central Asia? What are the states forming it? Why not others? What makes it possible to talk of it as a ‘region’ in ES terms and to justify such choice? These questions are important in two respects. On the one hand, in a wider sense, they help clarify one of the most contested parts of the world in terms of definitional labels, especially from an IR viewpoint. On the other hand, in a narrower sense, they set the boundaries within which the theory will be applied and tested, thus identifying a precise sub-level under the global one.

The third and last one, instead, is concerned with the methodology and the methods of the research. After discussing the theory used in this project and the particular region on which it is going to be applied, the presentation of the approach and the methods with which the two are connected seems a perfectly logical move. Again, the need to devote a section to methods and methodology responds to a double necessity, one wider and one narrower. At a wider level, it has been widely recognised that a sharp distinction between methods and methodology is an essential part of any research design, and that their usual conflation, as if they were synonyms, inhibits much of research’s potential (6 and Bellamy 2011). At a narrower level, in particular, given the difficulty of dealing with ES methods and methodology already noted in the introduction and the literature review, a new methodology for the theory will be discussed, and its potential benefit and pitfalls assessed. Finally, the conclusion will summarise these three sections and will set up the purposes for the subsequent chapter.

3.1 The ES and the concept of international society

It is widely recognised that the ES, from an ontological viewpoint, relies on a well-defined tripartition: that of international system, international society and world

society (Bull 1977; Wight 1977; Dunne 1998; Little 2000). Despite the simplistic temptation of treating them as separate ontologies and distinct realms with their own patterns of relations and peculiarities, these three configurations of international relations have in fact to be looked at as mutually inter-penetrating, mutually reinforcing and simultaneously coexisting. However, the concept of international society may be said to be the hallmark of ES theory (Suganami 2002; Bellamy 2005; Linklater and Suganami 2006).

We have already defined international society in ‘Bullian’ terms in the introduction. However, given the pre-eminence of this concept in the whole work, it may be advisable to recall it again, and to pair it with that of Bull and Watson (1984:1). According to Bull (1977:13), and international society exists

when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions,

while according to Bull and Watson (1984: 1) an international society is

a group of states (or, more generally, a group of independent political communities) which not merely form a system, in the sense that the behaviour of each is a necessary factor in the calculations of the others, but also have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognise their common interest in maintaining these arrangements.

A third definition is that of Buzan (2004: 121):

[an international society] is about the instrumental norms, rules and institutions created and maintained by states (or independent political communities), whether consciously or not, to bring a degree of order into their system of relationship.

Now it is time to compare these three definitions and to see what their common traits are. The first common trait may be ontological. In all three definitions, the main actor is *the state*. The reference to ‘independent political communities’ is, however, of the utmost importance if we consider international society in an evolutionary perspective, and therefore starting before the Westphalian concept of sovereign state was adopted. In ES terms, the state is usually conceived as the well-known subject of international

law, and therefore as a territory with clear and defined boundaries, a population present on it, a government ruling on that territory and a capacity of conducting relations with others. In a more encompassing way, however, the state is also 'any form of post-kinship, territorially-based, politically centralised, self-governing entity capable of generating an inside-outside structure' (Buzan and Little 2000: 42).

The second common trait is the emphasis on *institutions*. The concept of institution, as it may be expected, is a controversial one. It may refer to what in IR theory are usually known as *regimes* (Krasner 1983), i.e. designed organisational agencies with the specific task of favouring, fostering and enhancing the cooperation among like-units (states) in a given area of international relations. Following this definition, therefore, the UN is an institution; the European Central Bank (ECB) is an institution; the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is an institution.

Another meaning of institution, however, less organisational/procedural and more sociological/constitutive, is what lies at the heart of the concept of international society. The meaning used here is that of practices, habits, rules of conduct, close to what Searle (1995) calls 'institutional facts', i.e. facts created 'when a social function and status are allocated to something but which do not reflect its intrinsic physical properties' (Buzan 2004: 166), such as marriage, or money, or funerals.

Another definition which comes close to the meaning intended by ES theorists is that of the so-called Stanford School, which defines institutions as 'cultural rules giving collective meaning and value to particular entities and activities, integrating them into larger schemes' (Thomas, Meyer et al. 1987).

Far from being synonymous with 'regimes' as described above, therefore, the ES refers to institutions as to those rooted, durable but by no means eternal codified practices which channel the behaviour of the states (or, in general, actors) forming the society, giving a sense of *order* and *predictability* to their actions. Institutions are rooted and durable, but not eternal. Without looking at IR, and referring simply to history and sociology, one would certainly note how slavery was an accepted practice in ancient Greece and Rome (and even later), and how polytheism was widely diffuse before the advent of the great monotheistic religions. In IR, several institutions have arisen quite recently, such as sovereignty and nationalism, whereas other have declined after a long persistence, such as colonialism and inequality of people (Mayall 1990; 2000a; Buzan 2004, Holsti 2004). The next question is: what are the institutions of present-day international society?

In 1977, Bull provided a list for those that, according to him, were the most important regulative institutions of international relations: diplomacy, meant as the ability of a state to establish and maintain peaceful relations with other states through the creation of embassies, consulates, representative bodies and through the use of treaties, conventions and notes; international law, i.e. the acceptance and the validation of the basic legal norms that support the coexistence of different states in the system, such as sovereignty rights, non-intervention and respect of agreements (*pacta sunt servanda*); balance of power, that is to say, the principle by which states prevent the equilibrium of the system from being disrupted through the matching of relative capabilities, either via alliances or via domestic empowerment; great power management (GPM), i.e. the acceptance that, despite the constitutional and ontological equality of states in the system, some states, by virtue of their capabilities and resources, are entitled more than others to the preservation of order and of the respect of all the other institutions; finally, war, meant as the ultimate means of resolution for conflicts, the extreme action to disrupt and at the same time re-establish order among the units.

Other authors have, more recently, made some amendments to this list, especially given the changed nature of the international context in which states now are said to operate. Kalevi Holsti, for example, adds trade and territoriality (2004), while James Mayall brings in the new concepts of self-determination and nationalism, non-discrimination and human rights (2000b).

However, in a major re-thinking of ES theory, Buzan has modified the former list of institution, by introducing 'sovereignty', defined as the condition of not being subjected to any other supra-ordinated entity and by introducing a double distinction. On the one hand, we now have the distinction between master and derivative institutions, based on the simple concept that some institutions are so 'fundamental' and 'foundational' that may be said to include, rather than stand close to, others. On the other hand, we have the distinction between primary and secondary institutions, the former being the institutions meant in ES terms discussed above and the latter being proper regimes and IGOs in neo-liberal terms, which may be said to be the representation and the application of the fundamental principle contained in the master/derivative institutions.

With respect to the previous institutions, it may be noted that some of them are downgraded to a 'derivative' status (such as international law, derivative of

sovereignty, and war, derivative of GPM) and others have been added, such as the market and environmental stewardship (Mayall 2000b; Falkner 2012).

The new list of institutions that results from these distinctions and add-ons represents the international institutions of the contemporary era, and it is presented below:

Primary Institutions		Secondary Institutions
Master	Derivative	(examples of)
Sovereignty	Non-intervention	UN General Assembly
	International law	ICJ, ICC
Territoriality	Boundaries	Some PKOs
Diplomacy	Bilateralism	Embassies
	Multilateralism	United Nations
Great power management	Alliances	NATO
	War	UN Security Council
	Balance of Power	
Equality of people	Human rights	UNHCR
	Humanitarian intervention	
Market	Trade liberalisation	WTO
	Financial liberalisation	IMF
	Hegemonic stability	
Nationalism	Self-determination	Some PKOs
	Popular sovereignty	
	Democracy	
Environmental stewardship	Species survival	CITES
	Climate stability	Kyoto Protocol

Source: adapted from Buzan (2004: 187).

The third trait that binds together the three definitions of international society provided above is the total absence of the concept of *cooperation*. This fact has actually to be recognised, since the very concept of international society has been

recently (and mistakenly) referred to cooperative practices and progressive integration (especially at the regional level, which is what is of our interest here).

For example, Mohammed Ayoob stresses the fact that ‘the distinctive features of a regional society [against those of a regional system] must include an implicit if not explicit acknowledgement of its members’ interdependence with each other in the realms of both security and welfare. They must also include at least an embryonic version of “cognitive regionalism” that can provide a minimum degree of shared regional identity’ (1999: 249). Bjorn Hettne and Fredrik Soderbaum speak of ‘an “international society” of cooperating states, as used in the so-called English School of IR theory’ (2000: 465). Cummings, speaking of Central Asia, argues that

[r]egime preservation has encouraged the pursuit of state interests but has primarily discouraged the pooling of sovereignty out of fear that an outside power will encroach upon their policy-making. Regime preservation has also been the primary reason why regional co-operation has assumed only a virtual [...] dimension. The sorts of shared purposes and common institutions necessary for the development of an international society (here regional society in English School or rationalism’s terms) does not therefore exist (2012: 179, emphasis added).

She then defines Central Asia as a ‘system’, on the basis of the lack of regional initiatives and cooperative policies.

Now, two things are worth noting. Firstly, such a reading of international society misses its original meaning, that of a social configuration of relations mainly finalised at the maintenance of *order* and of some *predictability* of actions, which by no means require domestic isonomy and pooling of sovereignty (on this point with respect to Central Asia, see Gleason 1997a: 229).

Secondly, running the risk of stating the obvious, it must be recalled that an international society is a *social* fact. And given that the notion of ‘society’ per se does not carry any positive meaning, it may incorporate different levels and forms of interactions. As it has been rightly pointed out,

the term “society” should not be read as in itself carrying any necessarily positive connotation. To say that society, in the sense of social structure, is more fully developed in one place or time than in another is not to say that this is therefore an improvement in some moral sense. As Luard (1976: 340) reminds us: “a society may be closely knit yet moved by frequent conflict” (Buzan 2004: 15).

As history shows, we can have warrior societies, highly conflictual societies, societies that aim at coexistence and basic recognition or more cooperative and integrated societies. Nonetheless, they all retain a level of ‘societiness’, which may rely on conflict, on coexistence or on mutual support and cooperation. Societies that aim at coexistence and minimal form of cooperation/interaction may be defined *pluralist*, whereas societies that seek closer integration, more cooperation among their members and collective enterprises may be defined *solidarist* (Linklater and Suganami 2006).

In a pluralist environment, ‘coexistence is rooted in the self-interest of the states composing interstate society. Self-interest certainly stretches to cooperation in pursuit of a liveable international order, but it keeps the focus on differences among the states and does not require that they agree on anything beyond the basics [...]’ (Buzan 2004: 145), whereas solidarism foresees not only that ‘a unity of interests and sympathies exists amongst a set of actors, but that this kind of unity is of a type sufficient to generate capability for collective action’ (Buzan 2004: 141).

Therefore, ‘international society’ can be seen as an idealtype resting on a spectrum of different exemplifications, from the least cooperative to the most cooperative/integrated. It is a matter of what institutions, intentions and interests are shared whether a society is more on the pluralist side or on the solidarist one, certainly not a matter of the ‘societiness’ of the society. There is nothing like ‘more social’ or ‘less social’: this would mean to hold a normative understanding of ‘society’, based on the assumption that ‘the closer we are, the better it is’. What we have, conversely, are different manifestations of objectives, values and purposes, some requiring very little common action (pluralism), some collective convergence and efforts (solidarism).

By looking at the common definitions of international society found in the ES literature provided above, there is no reason to think that the ‘common goals’ referred to should *necessarily* be something beyond coexistence. Coexistence may indeed be a common goal, indeed quite an important one, being it the basis for all the possible future solidarist developments (if any) (Buzan 2004; Neumann 2010).

Therefore, to argue that a group of states do not constitute a society since they lack cooperative attitudes and integrative purposes is to misconceive the concept of international society itself, pretending to equal *a specific type* of international society (solidarist, cooperative and converging) to international society itself. That conflating these two concepts is a mistake is also evident if we look at another definition of

international society, this time provided by Brown (1995: 186, emphasis in the original):

Society is a norm-governed form of association, but the norm in question emerge out of the requirements for social co-operation and do not *necessarily* require commitment to any common projects, common interest or common identity beyond what is required for social coexistence.

The fourth and last commonality of the four definitions of international society is left to be discussed: the absence of any reference to liberal, Western values. As a matter of fact, it is important to note that words such as ‘goals’, ‘values’, ‘institutions’, ‘rules’ and so forth are *voces mediae*, that is to say, words devoid of any political connotation, which is instead given only by the actor involved in the characterisation or use of them.

Why stressing this fact? Because in recent years, in the same way as the concept of international society has been considered as a synonym with cooperation, the concept of international society has been used as a synonym for international community, the West and the liberal project (Cox 1993; Gonzalez-Pelaez and Buzan 2003; Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009).

This emphasis on the global liberal international society has had three consequences. The first one is that it attaches a precise connotation of values derived from the solidarist experience of the West to the concept of international society which, as it has been discussed, is largely formed by neutral concepts; as it has been pointed out, ‘[s]olidarism, like society, is not necessarily nice. Solidarity is about shared interests and sympathies, and can encompass a wide range of values’ (Buzan 2004: 269). Secondly, it assumes that Western solidarism (and the institutions and norms attached to it) has successfully spread everywhere, whereas it is not difficult to see in many different parts of the world, reactions and resistances to human rights activities, reckless financialisation of the economy and democracy-promotion projects. Thirdly, and strictly related to the former, it has contributed to the neglect of the sub-regional level, and of the analysis of the different conformation that the global international society may assume once down-graded on a specific regional scale (Zhang in Buzan 2004; Acharya and Buzan 2009).

This neglect is actually extremely important if one pays attention at the inclusive/exclusive social dynamics of globalisation, in response to which cultural

and value-related issues assume a crucial role in managing the slow, but nonetheless present, world-wide diffusion of given values and norms. For a full understanding of the research, therefore, the concept of regional international society is what we have to turn to now.

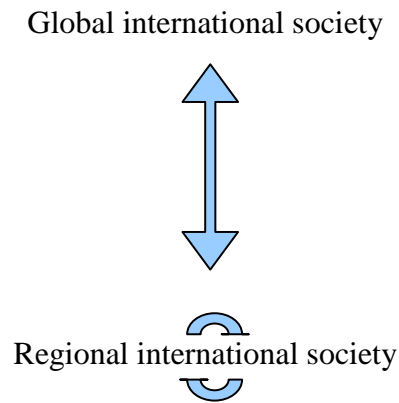
3.2 Regional International Society

A regional international society is the translation of the dynamics of a global international society as depicted above on a smaller, regional scale. Following the ending note of the previous paragraph, the idea of a regional international society is meaningful if three conditions hold:

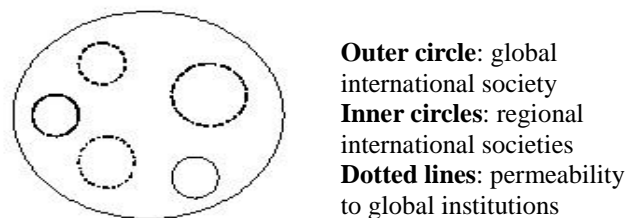
- the region considered has to be identifiable in theoretical and empirical terms;
- the alleged international society present there has to be distinct from the one present at the global level (for example in terms of institutions adopted);
- on the same line, the alleged international society present there has to be to some extent distinct from other regional international societies.

The first two conditions are discussed in the present thesis, with the first one being the subject of the next subsection and the second one being actually the research question. The third one, on the contrary, is only potentially verifiable here, since it would presuppose a comparative work on the different international societies present in the world system, which does not exist at the moment and which actually this work aims to be a part of.

By looking at the second condition, moreover, one understands that a thorough inquiry into a regional society must always rely, apart from an assessment of the relations *within* a region (where the specific institutions are found), on the binomial relation *between* the global and the regional international societies (where the differences between the two are evaluated).



While the *concept* of regional international society has recently gained momentum in the literature, quite paradoxically the *formation* of a regional international society has not been widely treated. Here it is presented an indicative model for the formation of a regional international society, which does not intend to be definitive and simply intends to shed some light on why a regional international society should or may exist.



To create this model, we have to proceed in a clear and logical way: we need to start, again, from the second ‘existential condition’ of a regional international society. It has been said that, while enjoying some, even many, institutions at the global level, it must have a distinct institutional configuration (in the sense that it has different, or modified, or missing institutions when compared to the global level).

The number of institutions shared and accepted may be higher in some regions than others, with some regions with such thin ‘institutional borders’ that may be considered as a subset of the global level, while some regions may be far more resistant to established global norms, while others may be closed to all of them (case limit).

The task is, therefore, to explain the presence in the model of both the dashes and the spaces among them, as well as the wide or narrow distance between the dashes (which here have been normalised for purposes of simplicity).

Here, by integrating Acharya's concepts of norm localisation and norm subsidiarity (2004; 2011), it is argued that a regional international society is formed by the operation of three simultaneous dynamics: acceptance of the norm/institution, modification of it and rejection/substitution of it.

It may be argued, for example, that a given region shares all the norms and institutions of the global, Western international society, since it believes that those institutions are not only feasible with its regional normative environment, but legitimate as well. This is the case of the EU (Diez and Whitman 2002), which can be actually be considered a regional-sized model of what is meant by liberal, Western international society.

However, a region can see a norm or institution of the global level as feasible with its local dynamics, but requires a degree of mediation between 'emerging transnational norms and pre-existing regional normative and social orders', in a process which seeks to enhance 'congruence between transnational norms (including norms previously institutionalized in a region) and local beliefs and practices' (Acharya 2004: 241). This may be the case, for example, of those countries that, being formerly adherent to a Communist ideology, have turned rapidly to a market economy without completely dismissing the presence of state control over the economy.

Moreover, there can be the case in which a region is mostly impermeable to specific norms and institutions, and therefore rejects such norms due to prior social and cultural diversities and due to resistance to outside global, more powerful actors. In this case, states forming the region (or the bloc) develop their own norms and institutions to resist intrusion and penetration from external normative claims, incompatible with the interests and the 'cognitive priors' (Acharya 2011) and 'local imperatives' (Adamson 2005) of the region considered. The most visible case is certainly resistance to external intervention in ASEAN countries, as well as the hindered progress of the human rights agenda in given parts of the world, or, related to it, efforts to encourage democratisation and rule of law.

Therefore, by combining the two concepts of norm localisation and norm subsidiarity, a more precise analytical model for the formation and existence of a regional international society has been provided.

Now that the theoretical model of the thesis has been presented, explained and illustrated, it is nonetheless important to distinguish more sharply the concepts employed in the thesis from others that may be similar but not synonymous with them, and to reiterate some points for purposes of clarification.

The first thing to note is that a regional international society is not the same as regionalism or regionalisation. By 'regionalism' it is usually meant a form of association between states, more or less formalised, aiming at the development of deeper forms of economic and/or political integration in a specific geographical area of the world. In the process of constitution of regionalism, it is believed that, especially with respect to the economic aspect of the phenomenon, businesses, non-state actors, epistemic communities all play a role in the enhancement of regional ties. As de Lombaerde et al. argue, 'civil society is often neglected in the study of regionalism, despite the fact that its impact is increasing, as evident in the transnational activist networks and processes of civil society regionalisation emerging around the world' (2010: 737).

From this definition, it is clear that differences from a regional international society are at least twofold. First, 'regionalism' is a process, an array of practices and policies, while a 'regional international society' is a collectivity. The former may indicate the dynamics within the latter, but it is not ontologically the same as the latter. Second, in the notion of regionalism is implicit the notion of integration and convergence, or at least of closer purposive cooperation. This, as reiterated above, may perfectly be the case within some international societies, but not necessarily *all of them*. It should be remembered that a regional international society indicates an environment in which states, that constitutes the main ontology of an international society, feel bound by common interests and values in order to sustain their environment and to pursue the rights of life and property. However minimal, these interests and values are the gist of a society of states.

The fact that these interests and values may evolve and spur integrative dynamics, therefore igniting a process of regionalism, is entirely legitimate, but that would be a transformation of a regional international society from pluralist to solidarist. In the words of Mohammed Ayoob (1999: 248), a regional international society refers to 'a set of relations that 'requires a conscious recognition on the part of regional states that they have certain common interests which they need to preserve despite the existence of differences, even disputes, among them', paired with

cognitive regionalism, that is to say, a self-identification of some states with a specific regional environment (Barnett and Adler 1996). In logical terms, therefore, if one suggests that a regional international society implies a region, i.e. in the simplest terms possible a limited number of states linked by geography and interdependence, but not necessarily policies of regionalism. Such policies may develop only when the rules and norms sustaining the society are developed enough to allow for higher goals than survival and coexistence (in Buzanian terms, a regional international society marked by regionalism would be akin to a cooperative regional international society idealtype; see 2004: 159-60).

To clarify even more the plethora of concepts associated to regions, one should remember that ‘regionalisation’ is a popular, related term, which is sometimes used interchangeably with regionalism, but it refers rather to an increase of regional interaction and activity: regionalism refers to policies and projects, regionalisation refers to processes (Fawcett 2013: 5).

To conclude this first differentiation, let’s present the argument made above in more schematic terms. A regional international society differs from regionalism in the following respects:

- different focus: the former looks not just at cooperation and integration, but also at order, coexistence and cooperation as well as conflict, while the latter, as we have seen above, is more concerned with integrative and cooperative policies and projects;
- normative reading: both concepts are related to the normative side of international politics, but in different respects. The former is interested in the norms adopted by members of the region to manage their common space, while the latter is ‘normative’ in the sense of being prescriptive, given its inherent teleological approach to regional integration;
- norms rules and institutions: as stated above, the focus of regional international society theory is on social, primary institutions, on durable practices and behaviours, while the former is on policies and plans for economic and political convergence in the region;
- socio-structural reading: the two concepts look also at regional relations from different viewpoints. The former is concerned with a socio-structural reading

of international relations in the regions, looking at how norms and institutions constrain, shape and affect how states behave, while the latter look at a more micro- and meso-level: how different actors enhance and entrench regional interactions;

- quality of relations: the former concept looks at what forms of relations states in a region manage to achieve (coexistence, cooperation, convergence, power-politics) while the latter assumes the quality of relations as given (cooperative) and focuses on the policies and steps to achieve even greater integration.

The second conceptual clarification to make before proceeding is the difference between an international 'system' and an international 'society'. This distinction has been the object of a dispute within the ES, especially between those who don't believe the difference is useful at all (Buzan 2004: 98-108; see also James 1993 and Jackson 2000: 113-116) and those who think that a degree of ontological and normative differentiation is still relevant for ES theorising to be relevant (Dunne and Little 2014).

In the classic ES literature, by 'system' is meant that condition in which states are in regular contact with one another and where there is sufficient interaction 'to make the behaviour of each a necessary element in the calculations of the other,' while as 'society' the forms of relations and arrangements identified above in the course of the discussion of the theoretical model. The question is: has a 'system', i.e. an environment where polities do not share any meaningful contact, ever existed? According to Buzan, the answer is 'no'. All forms of social relations, however, hostile and minimal, imply very basic norms of dialogue or contact. Even open hostility and conflict, he argues, are still social relations based on social categories such as 'enemy', 'foe', 'competitor' and so forth. Therefore, his solution is to drop the category of the system in favour of a spectrum of international societies (2004: 98-108).

Dunne and Little do not agree, pointing to the necessity of a normative threshold to distinguish between a system and a society. How can an environment marked constantly by conflict and competition be considered as a society? Competition and conflict can be social facts, but they are not constitutive of a society. Therefore, they point to the conscious awareness of the members of a system that some minimal rules and norms are to be followed to prevent the system from

collapsing. Instead of an action-reaction relation, they see a shared understanding as the basis of a society. In the words of Chris Brown (2001: 427), both societies and systems are characterised 'by the existence of regularities...but in an international society these regularities are held to be norm-governed, whereas, in an international system, they are understood as the product simply of objective forces' (what for example Waltz expresses in terms of exogeneity: it is 'what may happen'). The realisation that 'maintaining the system pays' is thus crucial to the structuration and organisation of a society.

There is also another factor to which I would point in order to distinguish between a system and a society. If we are dealing with regions that come about after periods of colonisation or security overlay, such regions are highly likely to start their life as independent communities in the absence of norms and institutions that were once laid down by the metropole or the great power. In other words, they face the challenge of moving from a system to a society. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the newly independent Central Asian states were in search and need of 'house-keeping rules' to agree on, in order to navigate their way as independent communities. Once these norms and institutions had been adopted, the Central Asian republics started conforming them in a conscious way, mentioning 'the region' as something to be protected, national interests aside.

I argue, therefore, that this awareness and this conscious adoption of rules, norms and institutions, as well as awareness of their constraining behaviour, is what has marked the shift from a Central Asian 'system' to the 'Central Asian society'. Again, following Brown, one may argue that 'the society of states has a telos, there is a reason why we have and need an international society, whereas, from [a system or] a neo-realist perspective, the existence of plural political authorities is contingent – it just happens to be the case that we have an anarchical system, everything else follow from this (2001: 429).

One last caveat is in order. As the thesis will demonstrate, the society of states in Central Asia is far from a Kantian kingdom of ends, or far from fully cooperative and converging. Tellingly, despite participating in multilateral formats and speaking of a common 'region', it took some Central Asian states almost a decade to open embassies in other Central Asian states' territory. Competition, security issues, regional uncertainties and antagonism sometimes affect the stability and the development of societal dynamics. But as Bull has already argued, 'it is always

erroneous to interpret events as if international society were the sole or the dominant element' (1977: 55). The Central Asian case dealt with in this thesis will show that, despite the presence of a societal logic between states, elements of the 'system' are always present, and sometimes impinge on the development of the society itself. Yet, this thesis will also make the case that, as seen in Chapter 2, the literature has placed far too much emphasis on the systemic elements, while downplaying significantly the societal ones.

Before concluding this section, the nature of the relations with regional states and the great powers should also be addressed. Even if this thesis is purposefully concerned with international relations between the Central Asian states, a full account of the societal dynamics among states in Central Asia cannot elude the presence, on the borders of the region, of two great powers that inevitably have an impact on how relations are conducted there: Russia and China. These two great powers are very much different in terms of historical ties with the region, priorities in cooperation and ways of relating to the region.

Russia is, quite literally, the former patron, having ruled over the region for more than a century, first during the Tsarist empire and then during the years of the Soviet Union. The now-independent Central Asian republics were once 'Socialist Soviet Republics', and constituted territorial units composing the USSR. Especially in the years after independence, Central Asian states experienced the pain, both politically and socially, of being detached from the former patron (see chapter 4).

In terms of priorities, despite a recent surge in economic cooperation with the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Russia has always emphasised security cooperation over other forms of partnership (Laruelle 2014). The establishment of the CST first (1994) and the CSTO later (2002), in addition to several bilateral agreements, have served the aim of keeping the Central Asian republics under the military umbrella of Russia, thus retaining military and security-related links predating the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In keeping ties with the region and in the light of the past shared experience, Russia is very much willing to emphasise a common past, common shared experiences and 'brotherly relations', fostering a language typical of a 'Gemeinschaft' type of international society (Buzan 2004).

Moving on to China, differences seem quite straightforward. First of all, China is a relatively new actor in Central Asia. It is true that, in a more cultural and

anthropological reading, parts of nowadays China, such as Xinjiang, were and are considered to be part of Central Asia. Yet, it was not until the late 1990s that China started getting involved in Central Asia, and mainly for border-related issues, which in turn led to the creation of the Shanghai Five (see, again, Chapter 5).

In terms of priorities, China stresses economic cooperation, leaving the security aspect of regional international relations to Russia. While this is not the place to discuss in depth China's economic engagement with Central Asia, it is worth noting that in terms of investments, Chinese money poured into the region amounted to some \$1 billion in 2000 and by 2013 it had risen to \$50 billion (RFERL 2015), overtaking Russia in 2009 (Cooley 2015).

Speaking of political relations with the states in the region, contrary to Russia, which as we noted above uses a solidarist language, China stresses political pluralism emphasising the usual Westphalian norms of non-intervention and respect of sovereignty (one may think that these discourses serve the double scope of substantiating arguments about a 'peaceful rise' and to not annoy Russia in what is presumed to be its 'backyard').

Having now introduced the two great powers bordering Central Asia,¹³ two questions arise: first, are these countries *hegemons* in Central Asia? And second, do they have an impact on the relations between Central Asian states? In this section, theoretical arguments will be presented, while empirical answers to these questions will be provided in the course of the thesis, in particular in Chapters 5 and 7. A theory-informed discussion of hegemony requires, first of all, an analysis of what a hegemon/hegemony is, with particular reference to ES theory.

Within the ES tradition, hegemony is indirectly, albeit inherently, linked to the institution of the great powers, which generally 'serves to simplify the processes of international politics.' It does so because of the inherent power differentials that characterize it (Bull 1977: 206). Yet, in his reading of international society, Hedley Bull argued that great power management served the scope of preserving a *plurality* of communities. Also Martin Wight (1977) contemplated the possibility of hegemony in international society, but as a *deviation* of the preferable, anarchical plurality of states. Focussing on pluralism and on a society based on a multiplicity of states and

¹³ India's Prime Minister Modi has recently travelled to all Central Asian countries boosting trade and political cooperation with them. Yet, it is too early to assess India's role in the region as hegemonic or typical of a great power.

on a consciously operative balance of power (the antithesis of hegemony), it can be said that early ES writers were almost ‘allergic’ to the notion of hegemony.

However, one should remember that the need to conceptualise hegemony in international society is all the more relevant in the regional dimension(s) of it, as the likelihood of having middle powers at the global levels that exercise the role of hegemons/great powers at the regional levels is indeed high (Buzan and Waever 2003). Adam Watson (1992) provides one of the first, if not the first, informed discussion of hegemony in ES theory. According to him, hegemony occurs when ‘some power or authority in a system is able to “lay down the law” about the operation of the system, that is to determine to some extent the external relations between member states [of the system], while leaving them domestically independent’ (1992: 15).

The caveat he makes is that hegemony involves ‘continual dialogue between the hegemonial authority and the other states, and a sense on both sides of the balance of expediency’ (1992: 15). A hegemonic system, in Watson’s thinking, differs from a suzerain system in that the latter involves political control over the unit(s) constituting the system. This may happen, worth stressing, *de jure* or *de facto* (1992: 313), that is, in formalised or non-formalised ways.

Later on, he expands on his definition, arguing that by hegemony is meant ‘the material condition of technological, economic and strategic superiority which enables a single great power or group of powers, or the great powers acting collectively, to bring such great inducements and pressures to bear that most other states lose some of their external and internal independence’ (Watson 2007: 90). This, as is evident also in his former definition, is a *materialist*, realist understanding of hegemony, and may defy a more nuanced, norm-related reading of the concept as it should be expected in ES theory.

In this respect, the work of Ian Clark (2009, 2011) offers very useful insights on how to conceptualise hegemony in international society, and in this subsection I will discuss his theorisation of hegemony as a (possible) institution of international society with respect to the Central Asian case. Following Clark’s work, I argue that, in order to understand Russia’s position (and, to a lesser extent, China’s) in Central Asia, one should avoid conflating *hegemony* and *primacy* (or ‘predominance’), being the latter the mere superiority in material terms over a group of units.

The clear separation between hegemony and primacy lies in the fact that

hegemony is an institutionalized practice, legitimated within international society by its very members, whereas primacy depicts nothing beyond a distribution of power in which one state enjoys predominance (Clark 2011: 34). A realist reading of hegemony does not embed hegemonic leadership in the society of states, with the result that hegemony is not constituted by that society: hegemony remains exogenous to international society, and is a function of material resources, and of the willingness to use them. This says nothing about how international society chooses to view that leadership, or about the basis of any acceptance of it (Clark 2011: 17).

As a matter of fact, hegemony as understood in ES terms, involves a crucial component of ‘social legitimacy’: that is to say, the ability of recruiting ‘followers.’ Hegemony, as claimed here, describes an international-order project that confers on the great power under examination ‘a leading, but still circumscribed, role, but in which the focus is as much upon those followers as upon the would-be hegemon’ (Clark 2011: 4). In sum, in ES terms, by hegemony is meant *an institutionalized practice of special rights and responsibilities, conferred by international society or a constituency within it, on a state (or states) with the resources to lead* (Clark 2011: 4).

A main analytic theme is then that hegemony¹⁴ does not reside simply in indices of concentration of material power, taken in isolation from societal responses to it. Instead, to find proper hegemonic behaviour, one should look for episodes ‘where a concentration of power, at the very least, has not elicited counterbalancing coalitions, or active policies of resistance from other states’ (Clark 2011: 6). In sum, there must be a *constituency*.

In this respect, I anticipate that Central Asia seems to be ‘fractured’ when it comes to legitimising hegemonic practices, with some states seeking Russia’s protection (mainly Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and others opposing it (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, with Kazakhstan sitting uncomfortably in the middle): therefore, we cannot speak of proper *institutionalisation*. Weaker states, as argued, are of course more willing to bandwagon, but there does not seem to be a consensual regional approach to Russia’s attempts of institutionalisation of hegemony. Russia itself seems to be very much aware of this, when for example it shields itself from arguments pointing to ‘the return of the Soviet Union’.

Since, following from the previous discussion, hegemony nonetheless does *not*

14 References to hegemony in IR are abundant. See, for example, Waltz (1979), Organski (1958), Carr (1940), Lake (2009), Gilpin (1983).

seem to be incompatible with international society and in fact may even be an institution of it, the question to ask, at this point, is the following: if there is a hegemonic order in the Central Asian international society, what is its impact on such order? The answer to this question, with specific reference to Russia and to a lesser extent China, will be provided in the course of the thesis, especially in chapters 5 and 7.4 as said above. Yet, one may anticipate how the presence of a hegemonic power in a regional international society affects order there.

According to Ayoob, 'while, on the one hand, [the presence of a great power] creates a situation of quasi-hegemony, on the other, the hegemon takes on the responsibility of providing collective goods in both the arenas of security and welfare. [...] Usually, involvement tends to be instrumental in character and thus remains hostage to unilateral calculations made in great power capitals, It, therefore, usually detracts from prospects for the construction of regional society' (1999: 253). As we will see, the tendency of Russia to meddle in Central Asian affairs has been quite evident, both in legitimate ways (for example during the civil war in Tajikistan, as it will be shown in Chapter 4) and in less legitimate, transparent ways (water-management disputes and the Osh events in 2010).

The theoretical axiom that seems to come from the (restricted) literature on hegemony and regional international society is therefore that, when legitimate, hegemony can prove to be a stabilising factor in the regional order and can accommodate potential clashes with other institutions of international society such as sovereignty and nationalism, as well as legitimising existing forms of order (one may think of Thomas Ambrosio's theorisation of a 'Shanghai Spirit' in the region, for example [2008]).

Yet, when hegemony is accepted only partially and is not totally legitimate in the eyes of the members of the regional international society, it can prove to be a destabilising factor and a divisive instrument to exploit disagreements and competitive dynamics between regional states. This is because, in such cases, hierarchical relations are driven by geopolitical, self-interested considerations rather than being based on a more 'raison-de-systeme' logic.

As Kaczmarek has aptly noted, 'Russia has been interested 'predominantly with securing the status quo, understood in this case as preventing other actors from establishing their political or security presence in the region, and not with the process of legitimisation of its power in the region. While there is no doubt as to the existence

of common regional security interests, in this case they were articulated mainly by Russia, and were not agreed through a social process of interstate relations' (2014: 97).

There are two additional theoretical implications for the presence of hegemony in regional international societies. The first one is that we should expect more intrusion and interference in postcolonial contexts, particularly if 1) the newly independent states are in the phase of consolidation and 2) the former metropole is geographically contiguous (Vanderhill and Aleprete 2013). This would render the international society in the region 'open', with porous (social) boundaries, and prone to see external powers involved in politics.

Second, in cases of contested hegemony and resistance to primacy and taking advantage of their weak, open character as a society of states, regional actors will institutionalise a diversification of foreign policy leading to a 'management of great powers', thus bandwagoning with powerful states at the global level but enhancing their sovereignty. However, as already stated, empirical manifestations of these theoretical insights will be discussed in the course of the thesis.

For the moment, it is sufficient to say that 1) (the possibility of) hegemony has to be considered in the Central Asian context, that 2) this (potential) hegemony has an impact on how regional international societies are conducted, and 3) that this (hegemony) has to be considered as legitimate to be considered as such. Otherwise, we would fall back on the notion of a 'system' where relations between states are managed mainly via coercion and without normative content and shared understandings.

To conclude, let us summarise the main assumptions we have made so far:

- an international society, as well as its regional variant, need neither be liberal nor cooperative to exist: liberal values are just many of the values possibly upholding a society, and cooperation is just one of the many social dynamics that can define a social environment;
- an international society, as well as its regional variant, is subject to historical change, expansion and/or contraction. It is therefore the task of the researcher

to include historical nuances if he is to comprehensively portray the (regional) international society he is investigating;

- a regional international society is far more likely to feature hegemons and great powers than the global one due to the stronger position in the region of those states that at the global level are middle or would-be great powers. Therefore, ES researchers are more likely to deal with institutionalisations of forms of hegemony working on regional domains than on the global one.

3.3 Central Asia: a definitional chimera?

If dealing with international society is like playing with fire, dealing with Central Asia is certainly no less risky. This geographical concept, simple to define only in appearance, has been contested and opposed in many ways and with many motivations, and it is frequently subject to semantic re-negotiations.

We have assumed in the introduction that the region labelled ‘Central Asia’ comprises the five republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. This short-cut, however, cannot elude two impelling questions: are these five republics the only members of this ‘region’? And, do these five republics actually form a ‘region’? These two questions are made more difficult by the fact that, when dealing with regional international societies, ES theorists are not clear in what they mean by ‘region’.¹⁵

Here, it is argued that combining historical, cultural and material factors, rather than viewing the region through each of these ‘lenses’ separately, a comprehensively positive answer can be given to both questions. Therefore, let us proceed in order, and let us provide exhaustive answers for these two questions which constitute the first ‘existential condition’ for the existence of a regional international society.

In the literature, it is not uncommon to see ‘Central Asia’ uncritically used as a synonym with the five republics listed above (see, among others, Mandelbaum 1994; Gleason 2001; Abdullaev 2002; Burnashev 2002: 140; Polat 2002: x; Rahimov 2007; Pomfret 2010; Cummings and Hinnebusch 2011; Kavalski 2012; Laurelle and Peyrouse 2013), listing economic transition from centralised to market-driven

15 For a recent discussion of ‘region’ in the ES, see Costa Buranelli (2014a).

mechanisms, ethnic tensions, environmental degradation, presence of Islamic and Soviet traditions and authoritarianism as a general method of rule as regional characteristics.

Abdullaev, despite recognising the different level of Islamisation, development and economic performance of the Central Asian republics, maintains that 'Central Asia can nonetheless be regarded as a distinct region' (2002: 246), adding that 'they are all secular, moderate-nationalistic, conservative, and closely tied to the figure of their creator – the leaders of the state' (2002: 282). Cummings, in her admirable treatment of the slippery notion of Central Asia, argues that 'in contemporary usage the Central Asian, Russian and English understandings of the term more often than not refer to the five independent republics' (2012: 2).

On the same note, Robert Cutler affirms that the five republics constituting present-day Central Asia form a core regional sub-system autonomous from others (2007) and, paying attention to their common history and cultural traits, Gleason affirms that '[p]resent-day Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan shared common languages, historical traditions and values that bound them together as inheritors of common cultural traditions' (1997a: xv).

However, authors such as Vadim Volovoj recognise that '[t]he boundaries of Central Asia as an international region are extremely ill-defined' (2009: 100). Akiner seems to agree, noting that '[h]istorically speaking, Central Asia is an amorphous concept' (1998: 187). Lewis, in addition, clearly states that Kazakhstan is not part of Central Asia (2008).¹⁶ The notion of 'Central Asia', as a matter of fact, is said to encompass a wider part of the world, stretching from the Caspian Sea to North-East Iran, Northern Afghanistan, Mongolia and the Chinese province of Xinjiang. Especially in historical and cultural terms, these territories enjoy strong commonalities and common traits which make possible to include them under an overarching definition of Greater Central Asia (Starr 2008).

Some authors (Amineh and Houweling 2005) even enlarge the scope of the definition and speak of a Greater, Central Eurasia, including also the South Caucasus. However, as far as this second definition is concerned, one should consider the fact that local issues are usually framed in terms of 'Caucasian' and 'Central Asian' (Allison and Jonson 2001), and therefore maintain a certain discriminatory degree.

¹⁶ More recently, however, he has included it in the region (2012).

Going back to the Greater Central Asia definition, one could argue, however, that the five republics that are part of this greater region have experienced the territorial, cultural and socio-economic inclusion into the Soviet Union, a colonial experience that the other parts of Greater Central Asia have not undergone (Anderson 1997; Glenn 1999; Bogaturov 2011)

Clearly, this additional historical heritage, imposed on their common cultural traits, have influenced their late development as sovereign states, sovereign economies and sovereign societies, thus distinguishing them from the other components of Greater Central Asia (Glenn 1999).

In addition to this, one has to bear in mind that the Central Asian leaders themselves, in 1993, ‘imaginatively’ created the Central Asian region, adopting the expression *Tsentral’naya Aziya* instead of *Srednaya Aziya*, showing also that Kazakhstan was (and is) inextricably linked with the rest of Central Asia historically, religiously and culturally (Olcott 1994a). This top-down definition of the region given by Central Asian leaders continued also in the late 1990s and, with less emphasis, in the 2000s as well.

Moreover, inter-security and inter-societal factors help characterise the five independent, post-Soviet republics as the constitutive actors of the Central Asian region. Persistent disputes over unevenly distributed natural resources (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan possess water, which Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan do not have, but lack natural resources, hydrocarbons, oil and gas, which the other three have), concerns over trans-national threats such as radical Islam especially in the Ferghana Valley shared by Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, drug-smuggling from Afghanistan through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan towards the northern states, environmental degradation, border disputes among virtually all the republics and potential inter-ethnic conflicts spread all over the region (especially between Uzbeks and Kyrgyzs, Uzbeks and Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmens and Kazakh and Uzbeks) all inextricably link the five Central Asian states in what may be called a regional systemic configuration.

Even President Karimov of Uzbekistan, famous for his recent anti-integrationist positions, has come to recognise that ‘the stability of Tajikistan is the stability of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The stability of Kazakhstan is the stability of all remaining member countries [of Central Asia]’ (Karimov in Nazarbayev 1996: 234; see also Burnashev 2002: 143).

With specific reference to natural resources, it may be said that they provide the strongest 'relational substratum', given their role in shaping Central Asian intra-regional relations. Interestingly, it has been said that 'Central Asian borders do not represent natural jurisdictions if one bears in mind that the area's natural resources are inherently international' (Cummings 2012: 133).

Certainly the problems presented above have different degrees of securitisation in the five states but, as they are present in each of them, one may point to their significance on a regional scale (Bobokulov 2006; Volovoj 2009; Canfield 2010). Indeed, it is probably the intermingled, overlapping and interconnected patterns of security that may be said to constitute the 'regional glue' of Central Asia. According to one of the most common definition of a region as a coherent territorial space, in it 'national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another' (Buzan 1983: 106; see also Buzan et al. 1998).

If, in addition, one considers the fact that Xinjiang is a region of sovereign China, that the Caucasus structures itself as a weak sub-regional complex around the secessionist claims of some Russian-speaking regions and the Armenian-Azeri cold war, and that from an RSC theory perspective the nuclear issue with Iran has dragged it into the Middle-Eastern complex and that Afghanistan acts as an insulator between Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia, the argument of considering the five former Soviet republics as the only members of a specific Central Asian region appears more defensible.

The second question is related not to the geographical concept of the term 'region' but to its 'regionness', which may be defined as a region's perceived sense of coherence and comprehensiveness, and as the output of a process of regionalism. The lack of dialogue, cooperative dynamics and authentic Central Asian regional institutions among the five states has led to a disintegrative discourse (Qoraboyev 2010, Zakhirova 2012), therefore making implicitly two assumptions: that the regionness of a region is operationalised only by intra-regional regimes and regional association and, related to the former, that cooperation is the only viable dynamic for a successful regionalisation. However, two considerations must be made, one concerning the nature of the region itself and one the inherent meaning of regionalism/regionness.

A common mistake, especially made by Euro-based and Euro-centric scholars, analysts and commentators, is to assume that the European integration experience is

exportable and applicable also to other regional contexts. If torn states, devastated by a world-wide war, have successfully managed to integrate themselves and to concede part of their constitutive sovereignty to achieve greater benefits and a higher level of cooperation, why should not other states be successful?

The profound conceptual mistake, here, is to forget that the European logic of integration was a gradual consolidation towards a core (formerly the EEC and later the EU), while the Central Asian region formed as a consequence of a sudden detachment from a previously existing core (the Soviet Union), thus configuring itself as a post-unitary regional system (Colombo 2006; Fumagalli 2007).

In such a system, given the very recent independence of these countries, and their fragile condition of statehood (to some extent still today, but especially in the early 1990s) the refusal to pool sovereignty to pursue higher and common goals is normal practice. Quite the opposite, the decision to pursue regional objectives on the basis of common values and institutions without putting in common one's sovereignty (which is one of the values in play) has been viewed by the Central Asian states as a new form of regionalism, which may be defined as conservationist (Kimmage 2005).

The second consideration, as it has been said, relates to the concept of regionalism itself. As Hurrell warns, regionalism (or 'regionness formation') is 'a blanket term covering a range of very different developments and processes' (2007: 130). The phases of this processes have been outlined by Hettne and Soderbaum (2000):

- regional space, where two or more states find themselves interacting due to territorial proximity;
- regional complex, where contacts, interactions and trans-local relations (both positive and negative) shape the relations within the region, providing a basis for further and deeper interaction;
- regional society, where states start cooperative projects (note the diversity with the concept of regional international society discussed above);
- community, when cooperation and integration become even deeper, and
- regional state, when the region ends up being a *de facto* federal entity.

If one looks at these different phases, one notes that the five Central Asian republics,

while lacking strong cooperative attitudes on many common issues, nonetheless enjoy constant contacts, interactions and both international and trans-national relations (especially in the inter-ethnic realm), which strongly shape the character of the region.

Using a telling description of their intraregional relations, one may say that they are ‘united in culture, divided in politics; united in traditions and heritage, divided by circumstances; united by geography, divided by geopolitics’ (Tolipov 2010: 112). Rather than a clear-cut depiction of a region as necessarily cooperative, therefore, a region may present itself in an early stage of development, what here has been presented as a regional ‘complex’. Of course, this ontological condition is not fixed, as a region can feature greater cooperation as well as competition and rivalry.

Therefore, a region is not necessarily ‘less region’ because of its lack of integration. Far from meaning absence of regionness, not only is the lack of integration just a lower, less institutionalised level of regionalisation, but can well be, as it has been discussed *supra*, a form of regionalism *per se*, especially if one keeps in mind that ‘[r]egionalism cannot be exempt from the hard reality of economic viability and the cold logic of power and interest’ (Hurrell 2007: 146).

In his recent study on IR Theory and regions, T.V. Paul has recently challenged these precise assumptions, calling scholars working with norms and institutions to focus on regions in which enduring rivalries and conflict are taking place, since it is obvious that such rivalries and conflictual dynamics are rooted in ideational and normative structures as well and also to focus on those regions in which, despite weak levels of cooperation, we still do not see war (which seems to be the case of Central Asia; see Paul 2012: 5, 15).

Before discussing the methodology and the methods of the present research, a final note on Central Asia and international society should be stressed, with specific reference to the ‘chronological stretch’ of the research. While by following the most established literature on international relations in the region this thesis is concerned with the dynamics of Central Asia as a regional international society after independence, one may argue that societal dynamics between these states (and, arguably, these peoples) started during the Soviet period, or even earlier. This is indeed very relevant, as this hypothesis would substantiate the argument made by Wight (1977: 33) and more recently by Ayoob (1999) that a common culture is necessary to underpin an international society (and even more a regional international society, due to territorial contiguity and arguably more dense interactions).

With respect to the former, i.e. the Soviet period, the present research could not address it due to space limits and time constraints, despite the fact that this would constitute a valuable research project for the future. In fact, a new research project involving Yannis Stivachtis, Georgeta Pourchot and the present author is looking exactly at this. Research on this would for example focus on how and if Central Asian SSRs (then divided administratively in Kazakhstan and Middle Asia) started perceiving commonalities linked to socio-economic conditions during the years in which Moscow used them as a showcase for newly assisted states in Africa.

In addition, I conducted some research on the last years of the Soviet Union (roughly 1985-1990) to trace the emergent ‘we-feeling’ that would imbue the would-be independent republics a few years later, as it will be discussed in Chapter 4. In particular, I traced how emerging discourses of sovereignty, diplomacy, environmentalism and international law were already present in those years, and how a Central Asia ‘consciousness’ was rising in the political circles of the Kazakh and Central Asian SSRs as well as societies.

Also, one may also advance the argument that the origins of this international society could be tracked back, for example, even to the pre-Tsarist period (XIX century), and in fact research has been conducted on this (Costa Buranelli 2014d). It is clear that the international context in that period was very different for a variety of reasons: first of all, the political units constituting the ‘system’ were remarkably different from sovereign states. The units were, on the one hand, city states and khanates, administered by an absolute ruler under the patronage of the Ottoman Empire; on the other hand, units were hordes of nomads and tribes that, despite not being sedentary and territorialised, nonetheless interacted quite frequently with the city states.

Second, Islam was a major factor of unification, and the moments in which solidarist claims were made between the units (for example to challenge the Russian invader) were based on Islamic brotherhood (something that is not valid nowadays).

Third, as specified above, these units were not independent polities but were rather under the ‘protection’ of the Ottoman Empire. Yet, the degree of autonomy was quite substantial, and it should be remembered that the Ottoman Empire did not send any military help to the city states during the Russian conquest. Last, it should be remembered that these units, given their premodern character, did not adopt the institutions of borders and defined territoriality, with the consequence that war was

pretty much institutionalised due to clashes and disagreements over territories and lands.

However, despite these differences, current Central Asian states, as we will see in the course of the thesis, do refer to this past as a common one. In particular, despite at that time a 'Central Asia' did not exist (even during the Soviet period the region was named 'Middle Asia and Kazakhstan') still nowadays there are common references to 'Turan', 'Mawarannahr' (Transoxiana, or 'Land Beyond the River') as examples of peaceful relations between Central Asian peoples back in history. In fact, several interviewees, reflecting on the disputes that nowadays affect Central Asian states, argue that they 'used to be one people.'¹⁷

A third way to look at a possible 'ancestor' of international society in Central Asia is to look at the pan- movements and at the Basmachi revolt (1916-1934 ca.), informed by pan-Turkic and Islamist ideas and led by Enver Pasha with support of several Jadid exponents.¹⁸ These events projected a feeling of 'we-ness' linked to culture and religion, and a sense of 'colonial subalternity' with respect to the Soviets, who were considered as invaders in the same way the Tsarist forces were. As a proof of the efficacy of these events and ideas on the minds of the people, these pan-movements had their revival moment immediately after independence and constituted a challenge to the established borders and newly independent, nationalising regimes. Yet, these movements were swiftly quelled, and the new independent republics could develop inter-state dynamics fully following the Buzanian, structural scheme of independent communities adopting norms and institutions to manage their regional space.¹⁹

So, even if direct correlation cannot be established in a positivist way, traces of a common past and a common culture have certainly played a role (even if just

17 Interview with Official Uzbek source, location undisclosed, 12 February 2014; interview with Mars Sariyev, Analyst and Leader of Experts Club, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 3 December 2013; interview with Bulat Auelbaev, KISI, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 15 November 2013.

18 The Jadids were Muslim modernist reformers, pushing for widespread educational reform and envisioning a unified nation for all Turkic, Muslim peoples. See Khalid (1998).

19 'There were idealistic factors, with annexed projects. There were so many, believe me! Pan-Turkic, pan-Turanianism, the Grey Wolves from Ankara even drew the maps of this confederation! This idea, if I remember well, was quite popular, especially in Kazakhstan, due to ethnic factors, you know. Even moderate Islamic parties proposed integration. And they were peaceful, you know, but not very popular. However, as I said, the issue of recognition was prominent. At those times, there great pressures to revise the borders. Very strong. The presidents, quite swiftly, realised the danger. I remember there were even forces for a Greater Uzbekistan.' Interview with Official Uzbek source, location undisclosed, 12 February 2014.

‘mnemonic’) in giving birth to a Central Asian international society after independence. These narratives, in fact, are performative and constitutive of a reality that, even if it might not have fully taken place, creates a discourse of unity that informs relations in the present. Nonetheless, one should remember that it was exactly the Soviet experience that gave these polities the bureaucratic, diplomatic and territorial to ‘order anarchy’ after independence (Roy 2000). It can be therefore said that, while the cultural and the historical elements (the ‘Wightian’ component) of the Central Asian international society may be traced back to these past events, the functional, institution-based and pluralistic creation and management of (the ‘Bullian element’) it is to be found after 1991.

3.4 Locating International Society theory in methodology: the research design

In one of the few methodological debates that have pervaded the School and posed it against mainstream methodologies, we are told that the ES follows a ‘classical approach’ (Bull 1966), i.e. one based on the study of history, philosophy and international law rather than on scientific, quantitative measurement of defined variables conducted in a positivist, ‘trial-and-error’ format.

This position was maintained against what was known as the ‘behaviouralist revolution’, a shift towards quantitative methods and variable-oriented studies of international politics, which was taking place with great success in the US at that time. Indeed, Bull was so ardent in the defence of what he dubbed ‘the classical approach’ that according to him, if the behaviouralist conduct of inquiry was to be followed, ‘there [was] very little of significance that [could] be said about international relations’ (1966: 361).

Yet, in more recent years, in the light of the lack of any explicit methodological positions, the School has been criticised by several American scholars, who argued that the School was suffering from a ‘methodological quietism’ (Spegele 2005: 97), and was in the need of a more thorough clarification and definition of its methods if it was to be accepted in the golden group of the proper *theories* of international relations (Finnemore 2001; Copeland 2003). The ES was not immune from criticism on the Eastern shores of the Atlantic as well, with Andrew Linklater and Hidemi Suganami invoking a refinement and a conscious reflection on

what the methods and methodological premises of the theory were (Linklater and Suganami 2006).

Nevertheless, the School has attempted a clarification of its methodological stances, although these are not always coherent. Linklater (1990) and Roger Epp (1998), following Bull's definition of the classical approach, have argued that the ES methodology is better understandable as a form of hermeneutical interpretivism, which heavily relies on language and discursive categories. Conversely, Richard Little has stressed its methodological pluralism, correlated with its ontological and epistemological diversification: a positivist methodology to inquire into the international system, a more interpretive one when dealing with international society and a critical, normative one when assessing world society (2000), while Jackson has recently described the classical approach as a 'craft discipline' (2009), meant as 'observation, discernment, interrogation, diagnosis, and explication' (2000: 81).

A different view is taken by Buzan, who has tried to 'positivise' the ES and therefore to make it more rigorous analytically (Buzan 2004; Glavind 2009).²⁰ It must be said immediately that the positivism claimed by Buzan is not, strictly speaking, natural-science-like positivism. According to him, 'positivism' should be meant as 'finding sets of analytical constructs with which to describe and theorise about what goes on in the world, and in this sense it is a positivist approach, though not a materialist one' (2004: 14). It can be said that his positivist approach is a watered-down one, i.e. one in which the mind-world dualism is maintained (the first part of the definition) but where ideas and ideational factors are still prevalent over the more materialist ones (second part of the definition).

In this research, the methodology adopted is a variant of interpretivism, namely 'pragmatic interpretivism'. Following the ES tradition, this research will rely on the interpretation of words, facts and actions of representatives of the countries involved, in order to disclose the presence of an international society which is deemed, nonetheless, to be something *intelligible and observable*. Therefore, what is proposed here is a mind-world *monism* in the mind of the *statesmen*, since it is they who ultimately feel bound by the norms and institutions of a given international society, but a mind world-*dualism* in the mind of the *researcher*, since through the

20 I am grateful to Dr Johanne Glavind for having allowed me to read and quote the draft of her paper.

interpretation of diplomats' words, documents, statements and through the interpretation of empirical material it is possible to recognise structures and patterns that allow us to theorise about the world (or, in this case, the region) out there.

In combining these two approaches, the first borrowed from Manning and the interpretivism of the ES and the second from Buzan, it is therefore argued that a soft version of positivism is definitely compatible with the general interpretive and historical tradition of the ES. The result, in sum, will be an observable international society (if present) made visible through the interpretation and the discussion of words, documents and actions. In this way, this study can be classified as an international sociology of second order societies, that is, those of states.

Overall, this methodological qualification of the present research help us define it as an *inductive, qualitative, inferentially descriptive and interpretive*²¹ *research* on how the norms and the institutions of international society are framed regionally in Central Asia.

The inductive approach, rather than a more deductive one, has been chosen because of the very simple notion (here agreed on) that theory should be inferred from facts. As has been recently said, 'all too often social science begins with an elegant theory and then searches for facts that will confirm it' (Fukuyama 2011: 24). In order to avoid even sub-conscious mismanagement of data, here it is deemed that an inductive approach serves better the scope of inquiry.

It is qualitative since it does not rely on numerical data,²² nor on natural-science like experiments. Rather, it relies on words, institutionalised discourses, meanings and interpretation, focusing on 'behavioural findings' (Finnemore 1996: 24; Milliken 1999; Neumann 2008).

It is descriptive and interpretive since, on the one hand, it aims at providing a comprehensive framework in which the international relations of Central Asian states can be evaluated and assessed from a socio-structural point of view and, on the other hand, it also aims at disclosing how these states see the current constitutive norms of global international society, and to what extent they adhere to them.

21 'Interpretation can [...] be regarded as a special case of descriptive inference, because its purpose is to describe a state of affairs that cannot be directly observed' (6 and Bellamy 2011: 232 emphasis in the original).

22 In this respect, Chapter 6 of this thesis is different. I refer to it for a discussion of the methods used in that particular section.

This latter point raises the question about the methods to be used. As a matter of fact, ‘if social research is going to be taken seriously, then social researches need to use methods and tools not because they have been used before, but because they are fit for the task at hand’ (Greener 2011: 50; for the relationship between methods and theory, see also Finnemore 1996: 26). The methods, it follows, may be referred as ‘the set of techniques recognised by most social scientists as being appropriate for the creation, collection, coding, organisation and analysis of data’ (6 and Bellamy 2011: 9).

The main methods used in this research are oral semi-structured interviews with diplomats, state representatives, Central Asian members of international and regional organisations and experts, as well as interpretive analysis of diplomatic documents, leaders’ declarations and speeches, transcripts, press-conferences, memoirs, announcements, resolutions, their behaviours on the international stage and, of course, historical analysis of archival material when dealing with the recent history of the region: the whole array of ‘sayings and doings’ (Jackson 2000: 96; Gillham 2005).

The methodological rationale for these methods is that in order to depict a regional international society, *motivations, interpretations, discourses* and *intentions* of state representatives are crucial. As can be seen, the ‘word’, the ‘discourse’, the ‘narrative’ is crucial to identify an international society. Dialogue is at the very heart of an international society. As Robert Jackson maintains, ‘in politics talk is not trivial; on the contrary, it is fundamental. Written or verbal discourse is the main vehicle of political activity. Without discourse there could be no politics in the ordinary meaning of the word. Without international discourse there could be no international relations’ (Jackson 2000: 37). What is sought in these discourses through these methods, as a matter of fact, is ‘the self-conception of the actors who are participating in the process that constitute international [or regional] life’ to discover their *practices* in an interpretive process close to a participant-observer stance (Navari 2009).

It should be remembered, once more, that the purpose of this thesis is to verify the presence of an inter-*national* society in Central Asia, and to investigate its mechanisms and underpinning norms, rules and institutions. Epistemologically, at a very basic level, what is needed is to know what a Central Asian *state* thinks is right or wrong to do when relating to other Central Asian states. And given the impossibility of interviewing a state, the researcher needs to rely on its representatives, or at least with people acquainted with its international behaviour

(Jackson 2000: 29-32). In addition, the best case is when primary sources are available, either in Russian or in English and other European languages. However, secondary sources are used as well, provided that they are consistent, reliable and valid when related to the research question.

As far as the number of interviews is concerned, it should be stressed that a precise number is not required for two reasons. The first one is that, being the subject of interviews the state representative is not so easily approachable and therefore, in his or her absence, more importance will be attached to diplomatic written sources. The second one is that while state representatives are many, the state represented is one. Therefore, while interviewing many state representatives is a way of enhancing and entrenching the supposed existence/acceptance/rejection/ of a norm through a polyphony of perspectives able to highlight common stands but also subtle facets and differences, a small *n* of interviews does not affect too much the validity of the research (Gillham 2005).

The number of interviews conducted either in the region or remotely via the internet is around 40.²³ In the light of what has been discussed above, and in line with the ES canons, the sample is heterogeneous, consisting of diplomats, state-representatives, analysts, foreign-policy strategists, representatives of international organisations and academics *from the region*. This is important to stress because the intent was exactly that of acquiring familiarity with what *local political actors* think and believe about ‘the international’ in the region, with their understanding (what, in anthropological terms, would be an *etic* understanding), without imposing a framework.²⁴

These interviews were conducted during an overall 4-month stay in Central Asia, from October to December 2013 and from May to June 2014 in Uzbekistan (Tashkent), Kazakhstan (Astana, Almaty) and Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek). I could not visit Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, due to security, financial and time-related motivations.

Yet, as specified above, these interviews are part of the research material, not the whole of it. Archival (textual and photographic) material collected from the

23 The indicative sample of questions I used in my interviews is available in Appendix 1. I am grateful to Dr Yannis Stivachtis, Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez and Dr Linda Quayle for having guided in me in drawing up the list of questions in a manner accessible to the interviewees.

24 This methodological move, focusing on ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ discourses on ‘the international’, shows interesting overlaps between ES methods and grounded theory; see Glaser and Strauss (2009); Milliken (1999: 248).

Bayalina Library in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and primary sources dealing with regional international relations collected either in person or from the internet as well as news sources are also part of the material used to detect the formation and the operation of international society in Central Asia.

I fully acknowledge that the interviewee sample is somewhat restricted and not fully representative from a geographical viewpoint. Both the scope and the sampling, in other words, are limited. As a matter of fact, Turkmenistan is not represented at all, while I managed to conduct only a single interview (via Skype) with a Tajik academic.

The reason for the sample's narrow size lies in the fact that I was not able at all to contact potential Turkmen interviewees despite the fact that I tried to ask other Central Asian representatives to be put in touch with them. I could not travel to Tajikistan as, in the only period I could go there (i.e. when financial and time constraints were less strict), presidential elections were being conducted. Due to the elections and the particular climate surrounding them, several Central Asian colleagues advised me to not go to there to conduct interviews, as this would have put me in danger.

This led me to reflexively study alternative strategies to reinforce and enhance the research in the absence of first-hand data. I found two alternative routes. The first has been to use my Uzbek, Kazakh and Kyrgyz interviewees as *proxies* (Gillham 2005) for Turkmen diplomats and academics: 'what did your Turkmen/Tajik colleagues say', or 'thought', or 'did' was a frequent question I asked during interviews, although this is not to be found in the questionnaire (see Appendix).

Second, I read as much as possible in printed sources to try to 'reconstruct' the Turkmen and Tajik approaches to the region, and their fit into the set of regional relations. I am conscious that these two strategies cannot equate to an interview with a diplomat or a foreign minister. Yet, the hope is that they will nonetheless provide the reader with an understanding of how regional politics is conducted by *all* states. In addition, one may note that this limitation of the sample signals difficulties and challenges of conducting political research in the authoritarian context of Central Asia, and is a demonstration of how conducting fieldwork there is getting more dangerous and ethically difficult as compared to, for example, the previous decade.²⁵

²⁵ I am grateful to John Heathershaw for an insightful discussion on this.

Another fact that I acknowledge, is the limited amount of diplomats and/or state representatives who agreed to be interviewed despite several attempts to reach them. To my surprise, this happened very much in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, countries that are usually considered more open than Uzbekistan. In particular in Kyrgyzstan, reaching members of the government proved to be extremely difficult.

This is another limitation of the sample that had to be corrected with extensive research on media sources (past and present) and cross-interviews with scholars, academics and professionals of international affairs (such as international lawyers). What this shows is that the context of political research in Central Asia is somehow changing, becoming more restricted, and that the events in Crimea have certainly played a role in diminishing Western researchers' liberties (at least in this field) and raising the level of suspicion.

Another point that needs to be addressed is: how is the presence of/adherence to/opposition to a norm verified and 'operationalisable'? This question, it may be said, is what made many suspicious of the new 'constructivist turn' (Checkel, Finnemore et al. 1998) and of the general comeback of norms, beliefs and institutions in much of the rationalist strand of IR Theory (King, Keohane et al. 1994). How can we prove, how can we measure, how can we explain when somebody is sticking to a norm? Here, two prominent constructivist theorists, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, provide a sort of 'conceptual guide' to answer such questions:

We recognize norm-breaking behaviour because it generates disapproval or stigma and norm conforming behaviour either because it produces praise, or, in the case of a highly internalized norm, because it is so taken for granted that it provokes no reaction whatsoever (1998: 892).

Indeed, through justifications and reprimands one can identify not only the 'reference group' whom the actor deems it belongs to, but also to detect 'deviant' practices. It is therefore these linguistic *escamotages* (disapproval and stigma, praise, no reaction) the researcher has to look at when dealing with words (spoken or written) concerning the degree of acceptance of a norm, or an institution.

Pointing at *violations* of a norm, of a socially accepted practice, and at the *justification* for such violations in the words of statesmen is also another method to detect the existence of a standard, of a social boundary:

[i]deas may or may not have behavioural implications; norms by definition concern behaviour. One could say that they are collectively held ideas about behaviour. This is not to say that norms are never violated – they are – but the very fact that one can talk about a violation indicates the existence of a norm (Finnemore 1996: 22-23; 141).

Last but not least, the chronological dimension of the research should be addressed. Following the vast majority of works on Central Asia from an IR perspective, this research will trace the existence and the evolution of international society in the region from the early 1990s to present. It will take the reader from the very early days of independence to the most recent political developments in the region, showing how the relations between regional states have been in these some twenty years and how norms, rules and institutions have been adopted, used and interpreted.

While I am perfectly aware of the important role played by the Soviet Union in preparing the Central Asian republics to their life as independent states (one may think of how the institutions of borders, territoriality and government were transplanted from Moscow to them from the 1930s onward), this is currently being researched elsewhere (Seagle 2014). Also, as explained in the introduction and in the literature review, the intention of this research is to fill a knowledge gap in the recent history of the Central Asian republics as independent states.

This last section has addressed the methodology and the methods to be used in this piece of research. A case has been made for a ‘pragmatic interpretivism’ aimed at re-conciliating the two different strands of the ES, and it has been argued that interviews and *Verstehen*-based interpretation of diplomatic sources will be the best methods to defend the methodological choice adopted.

The operationalisation of the existence of a norm has been discussed, as well as the inductive, descriptive/interpretive, qualitative nature of the research itself. These specifications, albeit technical, are nonetheless important, since on the one hand this allows the reader/user of this research to easily follow it, while on the other hand it encourages other ES scholars to discuss their methodological assumptions in their research, engaging in what it has been called ‘methodological explicitism’ (Glavind 2009:19).

In this chapter, the concept of (regional) international society, what is meant by Central Asia and the methodological choices as well as the research methods have also been discussed. As was stated at the beginning, a precise and sharp definition of

this concepts serve as an 'orientative' map in order to prevent the reader from getting lost in this thesis. Now that the compass has been provided, our trip to discover whether an international society has been forming and operating in Central Asia since 1991 can safely start.

Chapter 4

After Independence: Central Asia and International Society in the 1990s

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is focused on the period after the independence from the Soviet Union, and seeks to understand whether the five newly born republics had a sense of regional affiliation which was potentially conducive to a fully-fledged international society, i.e. an environment where rules, norms and institutions are present, felt and observed. The purpose of this chapter is by no means a single one. Instead, several puzzles and questions will be presented, and answers to all them will be provided.

The years considered here are those from the early 1990s to 2000 circa, and this is not without reason. Firstly, it is exactly in this period in which the Central Asian republics, now independent states, underwent a proper phase of what I would call ‘Westphalisation’: having not ever been independent states with functioning machineries to conduct foreign relations and monopolise extractive and military functions, in these years the five republics had a first encounter with what independence in foreign relations meant.

Secondly, it is in this period in which different regional arrangements of the political space of Central Asia took place, thus signalling the attempt to ‘construct’ a ‘Central Asia’ from within the region itself.

Thirdly, at the end of the XX century this regional scheme of weak coordinative policies underwent a major restructuring (from the CAU to the CACO, which will be dealt with in the following chapter) and, moreover, the whole regional environment suffered a systemic blast after the intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. It is therefore a matter of contingency that the chronology and the political trajectory of regional relations is divisible in such a precise manner.

As noted in the literature review, it is usually thought that the five Central Asian republics, once independent, either were not interested in cooperating with one another (Hyman 1993: 298; Olcott 1994b, Chenoy 1997) or shook off their legacy to exercise full, substantive independence thus focusing on their domestic problems and the international arena and not on their region. Other narratives, while recognising attempts to cooperate at the regional level and to forge a pan-Central Asian identity

(Spechler 2002, Bohr 2004: 485-486, Linn 2007, Allison 2008: 190-191, Libman 2011, Cooley 2012: 149-153) quickly dismiss the 1990s period in Central Asia as a series of unsuccessful attempts at integration, a series of ‘failures’ (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013) and thus do not provide sufficient attention and analysis of how and why Central Asian states tried to forge such relations.

In addition, as stated many times in the course of the thesis, no attention has been paid to the norms and rules that Central Asian states adopted to manage their relations with each other, and whether these norms and rules were significantly different from those at the global level to allow analysts to speak of a Central Asian international society. In this chapter, I argue that taking advantage of ES analytical tools and conceptual vocabulary, it is possible to shed light on those years and on those experiences, revealing new facts and new attitudes in the intra-regional relations of Central Asian states.

The aim is therefore twofold: first, to verify if the states of Central Asia, once independent, adopted the commonly held institutions of international society, and how they used these institutions to ‘organise’ their regional space and to manage their new environment. This has to do with what I have called above ‘the creation of Central Asia’, i.e. a coherent regional space where norms and rules of conducts, as well as institutions and *habiti* were followed, adopted and internalised in relational behaviour and regional regimes.

Second, to verify whether there was any significant difference in the adoption/interpretation of institutions borrowed from the global level, and therefore whether it is appropriate to speak of Central Asia as a *specific*, discernable regional international society as argued in Chapter 3.

Therefore, the research questions informing this chapter are the following: *How did the five independent republics regulate their proximity and their relations as sovereign states? What were the norms and institutions that constituted their relational web? Did they form a distinct regional international society as explained in Chapter 3, and therefore with norms and rules different from the global level, or rather an international society highly conforming to the global level? How were conflicts resolved? And how did they regulate their interactions? What was the degree of cooperation and competition? Did the republics speak of themselves as forming a clear-cut region called ‘Central Asia’? What was the role of the Great Powers, most notably Russia?*

The chapter is divided in four macro-sections. The first section addresses the origins of a Central Asian international society already in the late 1980s, and shows how already before independence, feelings of commonalities were perceived by the would-be independent republics. I then begin the second macro-section by focusing on how the Central Asian republics as sovereign states structured their regional space.

In the third section, I analyse those situations in which the working of regional relations and mechanisms was tested. For the purpose of the chapter, the situations identified which best reflect the social nature of relations in the region are the establishment of the CAU, the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997), the institution of an international fund for the Aral Sea and the creation of a Central Asian nuclear-weapons free-zone (CANFWZ).

In the fourth macro-section, I try to trace elements of an international society in the shared authoritarian character of the region as well. In the concluding part, I will recapitulate what has been done so far and set out the plan for the future chapters. In the final part of the chapter, I will also make the case for describing 1990s Central Asia as a dead-letter international society (Murden 2009), where the lack of concrete results was, nonetheless, accompanied by a strong sense of communal identity and solidarist will to tackle regional problems in a concerted matter. The gap between intentions and results, I will argue, was the product of concerns with state-building and national security (Ayoob 1995).

One last point should be made before starting our analysis, and it is precisely that of utility. What is the contribution of this enterprise? This is a fair question, especially given the fact that we are not asking, as stated in the Introduction, ‘why’ questions, but rather ‘how’ ones. It seems, however, that the contribution of this chapter to the literature both of Central Asia and of the ES is threefold:

1. it aims to show that Central Asia, far from being fragmented and antagonistic, was in the early years of independence a dynamic, thriving although imperfect and weak, international society;
2. it seeks to apply new categories of analysis (normative and institutional) to a region known more for its role as a passive player in international politics, thus disclosing potentially new forms of political action and relations. In this

way, a novel narrative of how these states have entered global international society (something that is still missing)²⁶ is provided;

3. it seeks to provide a different reading of the region stressing those factors that, in previous and contemporary research, have been marginalised in order to shed light on the competitive, realist and ‘disintegrative’ aspects of Central Asian politics.

We can now start looking at the process of independence of the Central Asian republics not just *qua* process of independence, but also as an attempt to form a regional international society.

4.2 The bases for speaking of ‘Central Asia’ and proto-diplomatic cooperation among the republics

It may be said that, to some extent, the creation of an international society in Central Asia preceded formal legal statehood obtained in 1991. Or, at least, that the basis for it was created before international legal recognition was acquired. It may be the case that, while formally speaking these states adopted the pivotal institution of sovereignty in that year, the cultural, historical and identity-related ideas that usually underpin an international society were developed earlier.

Thus, I argue that the ‘structuration’ of Central Asia as a post-unitary regional group may be said to have started before the independence. It is important to focus on the period previous to formal legal statehood, as it is in the late 1980s, I argue, that a sense of renewed commonality and ‘we-feeling’ arose among the southern, Muslim republics of the still-existing USSR.

By relaxing the notion of international society from a mere structural interpretation and re-taking into account ‘Wightian’ identitarian and cultural narratives of self-depiction as a coherent group tied by historical ties, rules, norms and institutions, it is possible to trace the development of a preliminary form of

26 While the ES has always been sensitive to questions of order, change and evolution of international society, the developments in the post-Soviet space in the early 1990s have been surprisingly marginalised. With respect to the entry of new states (or ‘members’) in the global international society, one has just to read ‘States in a Changing World’, edited by Robert Jackson and Alan James (1993), to see that the only part of the world not dealt with in depth is exactly the former Soviet Union.

international society already in the late 1980s. What happened in those years is crucial to understand the future developments of the region vis-à-vis the Slavic component of the Soviet Union (Russia, Ukraine and Belarus).

A major role was certainly played by the notorious cotton scandal in Uzbekistan²⁷ and the ‘Russification’ of the southern republic via the substitution of local party leaders with officials chosen by Moscow.²⁸

As Olivier Roy argues (2000: 122-125), in the early 1980s the Russians started considering and treating the southern republics with contempt and disrespect, considering them as a haven for mafia and corruption on ethnic and cultural bases. In particular, attacks on Islam and a deteriorating economic situation (with economic subsidies from the centre to the periphery at their lowest ebb) contributed to resentment and feelings of marginalisation among the Central Asian republics. This created a psychological rift among the republics, pushed at the very frontiers of the Union.

Thus, for the first time, the cadres in those republics ‘no longer recognised themselves in a Soviet model that had become exclusively Slavic’ (Roy 2000: 127). And while this does not necessarily mean that strong national feelings were bred in the republics at those times, it certainly indicates that a commonality of self-perception as exploited, vexed, marginalised, Islamic (as opposed not to Christian but to Slavic) started linking the local cadres in the different Central Asian republics. In sum, as Roy argues, the political and economic mistreatment of the southern republics in the 1980s

generated an ethnic solidarity between cadres who up until that point had lived their lives entirely as Soviets. These cadres now saw the Muscovite elite no longer as comrades in arms, but as the expression of a chauvinist current operating classic Stalinist techniques and using the argument about corruption as a means to other ends (2000: 129).

27 Between 1976 and 1983, under the leadership of Rashidov, the Uzbek Socialist Soviet Republic (SSR) met the increasing demands for cotton from Moscow with production, harvest and efficiency records. This led to huge flows of subsidies to Tashkent from the centre. Later, however, the figures provided by Rashidov were shown to be false, and he ended up committing suicide in 1983 (Clark 1993: 189).

28 Satin became the first secretary of the Gorkom in Tashkent in 1983, while Kunayev in Kazakhstan was replaced by Kobin, thus sparking riots in Alma-Ata in December 1986. Changes took place also in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, although not with Russian exponents of the Politburo but with personalities favoured by Moscow, such as Masaliyev and Mahkamov.

This perceived sense of solidarity, commonality and bonded-ness, I argue, will be present in the early years of independence of the republics, thus affecting their peculiar interpretation of the institution of sovereignty and therefore contributing to allowing to speak of Central Asia as an international society.

As argued in Chapter 1, the year 1993 is usually taken as the founding date of 'Central Asia' as a distinct geographical area of the globe in emic perspectives, i.e. as recognised as having valid ontological status on the basis of culture, history and geography by its members. However, already in 1990 an important meeting among the leaders of the five republics took place, symbolising the already intent of unity and commonality that would serve as a basis for international society later.

As a matter of fact, on 26-27 June 1990, leaders from the Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan met in Alma-Ata to discuss the future trajectory of the region, considered as a unique and distinct part of the Soviet Union, deserving special treatment and attention in light of the serious economic, ecologic and social problems that member countries were facing. The meeting was attended by delegations of all Central Asian republics.

Karimov, Mahkamov, Niyazov, and Masaliyev all attended the summit as First Secretaries of their respective National Communist Party. Nazarbayev was there as well, welcoming his fellow colleagues. Proving the importance and the expectations of the meeting was the fact that the First Secretaries were accompanied by the Chairmen of the Councils of Ministers of their respective republics and the Chairmen of the State Planning Committees.²⁹

In line with Mokhira Suyarkulova (2011: 131) and David Lewis (2011), who argues that the notion of sovereignty was already in the mind of Central Asian states in the form of organisational and bureaucratic authority within their boundaries, I argue that this meeting was a further manifestation of their embryonic institutionalisation of sovereignty, and of the recognition of other republics as sovereign (essential condition for an anarchical society) and of the adoption of instruments of international law as primary means to communicate and sign agreements.

In these meetings and in the words that surrounded them a clear demarcation of 'Central Asia' as something distinct from the wider USSR and soon-to-be-formed

²⁹ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 27 June 1990.

CIS is visible. The perception of being left behind, of being a periphery, of being at the margins of the bigger political game was evident in Nazarbayev's word in his speech on 7 July 1990, at the 28th CPSU Congress. Noting the persistent marginality of the Central Asian republics within the developing context of the restructuring of the USSR and of Perestroika, he argued that the only way to survive politically, was to take into account the new reality of sovereign republics in the Central Asian region, which *contra* to the immobility of the rest of the Union were already going in the direction of managing their relations on a new level:

It seems to us that even now it is possible and necessary to conclude at republican level agreements between governments on economic, scientific, technical and cultural co-operation. Such an agreement was recently signed in Alma-Ata by leaders of the republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan.³⁰

Moreover, in another meeting on 24 November 1990, the two leaders of the Uzbek Republic, Karimov, and of the Tajik Republic, Mahkamov, pointed to the marginalisation suffered by the Central Asian region in the process of definition of the political architecture of the new confederation that would substitute the USSR. According to Karimov, the latest version of the treaty proposed for the creation of a confederation '[did] not take account of a single one of [their] proposals. Not to mention the chief one - on the parity and equality of all entities in a future federation', while, according to Mahkamov, the situation would continue to deteriorate because the republics often saw the centre's decisions 'as something alien and foisted on them.'³¹

The republics were therefore perhaps catapulted to independence in terms of paraphernalia, as Martha Brill Olcott maintained (1992), but certainly they saw the moment of independence advancing towards them.

As a matter of fact, several documents and protocols were discussed and signed during the Alma-Ata summit, all concerned with the deepening and the development of the relations of the republics in the expectation of the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union. It was already noticeable that economic and environmental matters were paramount in the minds of leaders. At that meeting, the intention was to set up a regional investment bank to finance promising economic

30 BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 8 Jul 1990.

31 Ibidem.

programmes. The leaders also focused on matters relating to the development of the consumer market, the production of consumer goods and the co-ordination of action in the sphere of external links. All of this, it was said, was targeted at the creation of conditions conducive to the transition to regulated market relations.

Moreover, as regards the Aral Sea disaster, the participants in the meeting agreed to set up an inter-republican commission to co-ordinate the efforts to resurrect the Aral Sea. Significantly, they also intended to appeal to the President, the Supreme Soviet and the USSR Council of Ministers to declare the Aral region a 'national disaster zone' and to draw up a state programme to restore the ecological balance in the Aral region in the period up to the year 2000 with the involvement of institutions of the UN, UNESCO and the WHO.

Technical and cultural, as well as scientific aspects of cooperation were also touched upon, and led to the signature of the Agreement on Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Co-operation between the republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. This agreement provided for actions to be co-ordinated to develop the economic independence of the republics and to implement an effective economic strategy and tactics taking their mutual interests into account.

Yet, another interesting factor to note about this meeting was that although the areas of cooperation were multiple and mainly regulative, all the leaders present were already reasoning as if they were already independent, thus committing to principles of *uti possidetis* and territorial *status quo* in a pluralist fashion, rejecting supra-republican identities and solidarist convergences among Central Asian states. There was no need for a confederation, especially because the Central Asian states were not opposed to ties with the Soviet Union in principle.

As a matter of fact, all the leaders present at the summit rejected the supposition that the June 22-23 meeting of leaders of Central Asian Republics and Kazakhstan in Alma-Ata might be the first step toward a confederation. Nazarbayev, Karimov and Mahkamov confined the significance of the meeting to promoting cooperation. They emphasized the sanctity of existing borders. The Tajik leader, Mahkamov, said a united Turkestan was out of the question.³²

Nonetheless, the diplomatic, cultural and organisational significance of this summit was noted in political circles of the West. In a report for the Heritage

32 Ibidem.

Foundation written by the Sovietist Leon Aron, it is possible to read that, although there were examples of competition and rivalry among the republics, especially due to ethnic and territorial issues,

an important step toward this [common regional order] was taken at the June 22 to 23 gathering of the leaders of five Central Asian republics in Alma-Ata. Among other documents calling for Central Asian solidarity, they signed an 'Agreement on Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation.' This envisions a kind of Central Asian Common Market to facilitate direct trade between the republics, bypassing Moscow and spurring regional economic autonomy. This Central Asian summit created a permanent coordinating council, to be based in Alma-Ata, which could become the nucleus of a future political confederation of the five states (Aron 1990).

Moreover, in the same period there was another meeting, this time listing independent movements and organisations from the republics, in the format of a conference. The only republic not represented was Turkmenistan (then Turkmenia), due to clashes between the delegates off to Alma-Ata and the police.³³

During the conference, participants discussed ways to reduce inter-ethnic conflicts in Central Asia, particularly the fight over land between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks in the Osh region of Kirgizia (present-day Kyrgyzstan), sought to improve cooperation between organizations in the different republics and regions of Central Asia and adopted an 'Appeal to the Peoples of Turkestan', the name of Central Asia before the imposition of Soviet power. The 'Appeal' emphasised the common religious, linguistic, and cultural background of the peoples of Central Asia and calls for them to cooperate in search of a better future for the region.

While in sum there was a peculiar tension between a demand for sovereignty (meant as the ability to carry out political, economic, diplomatic and bureaucratic actions in an inter-republican framework) and a desire to maintain a sort of political unity within the Soviet boundaries, Central Asia was already constituting itself as an area where a common understanding of the problems, the challenges and the needs of the republics were shared and perceived.

The very need to call for a summit among those five countries was already indicative of their perception as a regional grouping, although the tasks set in the meeting were perhaps too high for not-yet-independent republics.

33 Paul Goble, 'Central Asians Form Political Bloc' Report on the USSR, 13 July 1990, p. 19.

The solidarity between the Central Asian republics (and notably, always with the participation of Kazakhstan) continued through the year 1991, when it was evident that the five states saw themselves as a clearly different region from the rest of the USSR in the need of specific reforms, arrangements and solutions to indigenous ecological, economic and social grievances.

An agreement on economic coordination and consultation was signed among by all the five states in August in Tashkent. The accord called for creation of a 'consultative council' to set economic priorities and planning in the five southern republics, comprising about a sixth of the USSR's 290 million people. Nazarbayev clearly saw himself as part of that group of states when stating that 'this agreement is vital to improving the economic situation in *our region*', while Karimov said '[*O*]ur *region* needs to defend itself ... The standard of living in Central Asia is unbearably low. It is *our* duty to raise it.'³⁴

Even visually and ceremonially, the signature of the agreement had all the facets of an international society in the making. Flags of each of the five republics hung behind the leaders as they signed the document at the end of the two-day meeting in Tashkent. Furthermore, a banner hung nearby bearing a green silhouette of a five-branched tree, a symbol of the new pact.

The tightness of the states of the region, bond to a perceived sense of peripheral marginality, reached its apex on 17 December 1991, when the statement by heads of state of the republic of Kazakhstan, the republic of Kyrgyzstan, the republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the republic of Uzbekistan was released.³⁵ In this statement, the five heads of states noted that the decision of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus to set up a Commonwealth of Independent States 'came as a surprise' to them, and that

The Centre's short-sighted policy has produced a deep economic and political crisis, has ruined production and has resulted in a catastrophic downslide of the living standards of practically all sections of our society.

34 The Associated Press, 14 August 1991, emphasis added.

35 Official Kremlin International News Broadcast 18 December 1991.

In addition, the five Central Asian leaders reiterated that the aim for the centre was

to take into account in these documents, decisions and agreements the historical and socio-economic realities, existing in the republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, which, unfortunately, were not reckoned with during the drafting of the Agreement.³⁶

If we pay attention to the words used by the five heads of states, we notice significant lexical choices. The ‘centre’, as opposed to an imaged ‘periphery’, was seen as a sort of ‘other’ which marginalised and pushed aside the poorer and underdeveloped republics. The reference to ‘our society’, linked to a commonality of historical, economic and cultural traditions and features is also interesting. They also mentioned ‘realities’, referring to precise and discernable characteristics (in political, economic, social and cultural terms) that contributed to mark the Central Asian republics as somehow distinct from the Slavic centre.³⁷

As these words, thoughts and declarations show, two things are noteworthy. First, the basis on which the Central Asian republics perceived their commonality and similarity (if not in terms of internal features certainly in terms of political and economic placement in a wider system of international relations) were already nascent and evident even before their juridical sovereign character. This perceived commonality, I argue, served as a springboard for regional initiatives and policies which will be analysed later. Second, despite the geo-administrative convention that considered Kazakhstan as separate from Central Asia, Nazarbayev and the political *entourage* of the Kazakh SSR considered their problems and fate as inherently linked and tied to that of the Central Asian republics, thus constituting, at least at the discursive level, an *unicum* in social, economic and political terms.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Feelings of being ‘discarded as a burden’, ‘abandonment’, of being different from the Slavic component of the USSR, of the need to create a group to have ‘more bargaining power’ vis-à-vis Russia and ‘needs to keep the existing common economic, political and social ties’ were the factors mentioned as determining the decision of the Central Asian states to seek cooperation and integration in the late 1980s and early 1990s also in several interviews conducted in the region. Among others, interview with Uzbek Source 1 and Uzbek Source 2 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 7 November 2013; interview with Kazakh Professor at KIMEP, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 13 November 2013; interview with Bulat Auelbaev, KISI, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 15 November 2013; interview with Official Uzbek source, location undisclosed, 12 February 2014; interview with Shairbek Juraev, independent analyst, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 28 November 2013; interview with former Kyrgyz Diplomat now Member of the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 2 May 2014.

In sum, already before their formal independence, the four republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan acted in concert to face their common problems and challenges, showing that:

1. The republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan had already a thin, perceived sense of commonality of fate, of necessity of cooperating, of urge to co-ordinate their various movements to preserve the *status quo* in that part of the Union;
2. There was already a sense of shared identity and commonality. Being at the margins, being left behind, being the periphery of the USSR, at least at the discursive level was a clear marker of a proto-regional identity, which worked as the basis of future inter-republican projects and attempts to future coordination and cooperation;
3. The republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan recognised also that they were linked by problems that affected all of them, and that therefore common solutions or at least common approaches and consultations were needed to maintain the regional situation stable;
4. While still SSRs and by no means independent sovereign states, they already adopted postures of multilateralism, inter-republicanism and moreover stressed the need to maintain the communities distinct and discrete.

The next question to ask is: How this commonality and sense of shared interests was maintained in the process of gaining formal, legal sovereignty?

4.3 International legal independence and the birth of formal bilateral and multilateral relations

The Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan declared their formal independence in 1991. Kazakhstan declared itself independent on 16 December 1991; Kyrgyzstan on 31 August 1991; Tajikistan on 9 September 1991; Turkmenistan on 27 October 1991 and Uzbekistan on 1 September 1991. On 21 December 1991, following the official dissolution of the Soviet Union, they all entered the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The reality of independence meant two significant facts. First, that the newly

born states entered a *system* of relations, where geopolitical imperatives, economic hurdles and physical elements consisting of transportation routes, shared territories and natural resources made the behaviour of each state necessary in the calculation of the others. Second, they also had to create a *society* to manage these heritage, left by the former Soviet polity and now a matter of the independent republics. That is to say, they had to consciously devise mechanisms for managing, regulating and ordering their regional space in a manner conducive to coexistence and stability. According to Bulat Auelbaev, Head of Department, Foreign Policy Analysis and Strategy Research at KISI,

[Central Asian states] wanted a union because these states recognised the importance of having housekeeping rules. After the Soviet Union the situation was really chaotic, there were no mechanisms to live together, every country was free to do what it liked. The intention was that of creating some mechanisms to live together.³⁸

Being now sovereign entities with the possibility to conduct independent foreign policies and the faculty to enter bilateral and multilateral agreements under international law, the Central Asian republics needed legal instruments to accede those agreements and to incorporate them within the domestic legislative environment. Moreover, laws concerning the adoption of international law were necessary to establish diplomatic relations with themselves and other states.

The tripartite adoption of *de jure* sovereignty, diplomatic instruments and representations and international legal instruments necessary to establish ties and bonds with other actors in the international system (be they states, international organisations or relevant economic actors) are the three cornerstones on which an international society can be built and maintained. As Barry Buzan and Richard Little (2000) and Buzan (2004) remind us, in the mutual recognition of sovereignty and in the exercise of legal and diplomatic dialogue is implicit the admission of being part not just of a mechanical system of relations based on a logic of consequences, but also of a society, where a logic of appropriateness operates (March and Olsen 2004; Merke 2011).

While diplomatic and legal relations in Central Asia, in the very first years, were conducted via exchange of notes and protocols, soon the need of official legal instruments to sign, adopt, reject and amend treaties became impellent. Turkmenistan

³⁸ Interview, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 15 November 2013.

adopted the law 'On the order of execution, performance and denunciation of international treaties of Turkmenistan' on 15 June 1995; Tajikistan adopted on 25 June 1993 the law 'On the order of detention, ratification, implementation and denunciation of international treaties of the Republic of Tajikistan'; Uzbekistan adopted the law 'On international treaties of the Republic of Uzbekistan' on 22 December 1995; Kyrgyzstan adopted the law 'On conclusion, ratification and denunciation of the international treaties of the Kyrgyz Republic' on 7 September 1996; Kazakhstan implemented the law 'On the order of execution, performance and denunciation of international treaties of the Republic of Kazakhstan' on 12 December, 1995.³⁹

While diplomatic relations were immediately established, formal embassies were opened with slightly more delay in some cases.⁴⁰

The first official diplomatic relations established in the region were those between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, with an official exchange of notes on 20 October, 1992. 1993 was the year when most diplomatic relations were concluded: Tajikistan-Kazakhstan (7 January), Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan (8 January), Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan (14 January), Tajikistan-Turkmenistan (27 January), Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan (16 February), Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan (19 May), Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan (23 November).

Diplomatic protocols and exchange of official notes were the two most widely used instruments for establishing formal and legal diplomatic relations. Embassies and consulates, whose functioning is regulated by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961, were opened between almost all the republics in a mutual manner.⁴¹ For example, Tajikistan opened its embassy in Kazakhstan in June 1993, while Kazakhstan opened its own diplomatic mission in 1998 (updated to full embassy status in 2000). In 1995, Tajikistan also opened its embassies in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, while Kazakhstan opened its embassy in Kyrgyzstan in 1993 and Uzbekistan in 1998. Turkmenistan opened its embassy in Kazakhstan in 1999.

In addition to establishing diplomatic relations, the most impelling issue for the new states was, without a doubt, the issue of border delimitation and demarcation.

39 This laws were retrieved from <http://cis-legislation.com/> on 14 May 2013.

40 For the creation of foreign ministries, see Abazov (1999a).

41 Mukhtar Shakhanov, Kazakh ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, said that since independence more than thirty diplomatic documents were signed by the states of the region as acts of recognition. Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 24-25 October 1995, 'Druzhba – tozhe talant'.

The borders of the five republics were traced in the period 1926-1936 when Stalin carved out the five republics following the principle of titular nationalities (Megoran 2010). Political narratives of chaos and disorder were used to justify arbitrary delimitation and demarcation of boundaries, and the ethnographic knowledge of the time was not sharp and comprehensive (Tishkov 1997: 30-33; Smith 1998: 67-72, 139-141; Polat 2002; Akçali 2003; Dagiev 2013; Ubaidulloev 2014). The result was that several minorities (sometimes even great proportions of the total population) found themselves, at the moment of independence, in a republic which was not their homeland.

The risk of inter-ethnic feuds and skirmishes was extremely high.⁴² Conflict among Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Osh occurred already in 1990; cultural and nationalistic forces coming from Tajik nationals based on narratives of restoration of historical justice operated in Samarkand and Bukhara, once Tajik cities, in Uzbekistan;⁴³ contested territories were also among Kazakhs and Uzbeks, Turkmen and Uzbeks. How then this potential regional conflict was avoided? I argue that, from an international society perspective, a crucial role was played by the adoption of the institution of *uti possidetis*, which is widely accepted in post-unitary/post-imperial environments.⁴⁴

The *uti possidetis* principle (Luard 1970; Ratner 1996; Hensel et al. 2006) goes against the Wilsonian principle of national self-determination, and argues that ‘as you possess, so you will possess’. When the principle is adopted, the frontiers established by the former colonial patron are deemed to be sacrosanct, whatever the national demands and aspirations of minorities are, thus consigning irredentist nationalism to the past. It is a principle conservative in nature, which aims at warranting the survival of the units, their territorial integrity, limited peaceful coexistence among them and the avoidance of future territorial wars.

42 It should be remembered that several post-unitary and post-colonial environments had to face similar problems. The Balkans and South-East Asia, for example, once independent, had to regulate their inter-ethnic and border-related conflicts *ex novo*.

43 Tajik historian Kamoluddin Abdullaev told me ‘The issue of Samarkand, for the Tajiks, is vital. Would you imagine a France without Paris?’ Yet, later, he added also that ‘the leaders of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have been so far wise enough to avoid the politicisation of the issue’. Interview, 15 January 2014, Skype interview from Milan, Italy.

44 Latin American, African and Middle Eastern countries, for example, all have adopted the institution of *uti possidetis* to regulate and cool down potential border-related conflicts and nationalistic revanchism.

In adopting the institution of *uti possidetis*, the five republics demonstrated a fair acquaintance with the instruments that the institution of international law offered them to mitigate conflict and to regulate their regional environment. Had realist logics prevailed, it is likely that the early 1990s would have observed bloody and violent interstate conflict in Central Asia on a massive scale, something that despite the several predictions (Hashim and Rashid 1992, Hyman 1993, Akçali 2003) did not occur.⁴⁵ The perception of the importance of inviolability of borders is evident, for example, in the words of the Uzbek president Islam Karimov, who already in 1992 stressed that the issue of borders had to be resolved by sticking to the present situation without altering the *status quo*. Here below is the text of the interview where he affirmed this principle:

*My view on [Uzbeks in Tajikistan] is unequivocal. Uzbeks live there. We will be with them, body and soul, we will protect them, but Uzbeks now reside within Tadzhikistan and are citizens of Tadzhikistan. They must obey its laws and Constitution. If we fail to stick to these basic principles, chaos will set in here. I have repeatedly stressed -- and was last compelled to speak about it at the news conference in Bishkek -- that those who wish to break up Central Asia talk about borders. About artificial borders which were arbitrarily drawn back in 1924. Those borders failed completely to reflect national, natural or ethnic demarcation lines. But when someone wants confrontation between republics, he speaks about borders. I am categorically opposed to such talks and believe that the leaders of Central Asia can reach an agreement among themselves. There are no problems in this.*⁴⁶

During the bloody clashes in Osh in 1990, which could have led to other territorial claims, nationalistic forms of revanchism and therefore to a pan-regional conflict, it was the Kyrgyz President himself, Askar Akaev, who recognised that the choice of Uzbekistan to stick to the norm of *uti possidetis* and of the inviolability of borders was paramount in preserving (at least) inter-state peace:

I acceded to the presidency immediately after the Osh tragedy, when, in the space of two days of interethnic carnage, hundreds of Uzbeks and Kyrgyz died senselessly. By some miracle, we spared

45 See also Current Digest of the Russian Press, The (formerly The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press), n. 1, Vol.45, 3 February 1993, pp.: 5-5.

46 Official Kremlin International News Broadcast 1992, emphasis added. A few years later, at a conference of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek intellectuals, Nazarbayev solemnly affirmed that '[Kazakhstan] did not and will not lay any territorial or other claims against anyone' and that '[t]here are none and must not be any disputes between the Central Asian states' (Interfax Russian News 29 September 1999).

the republic a second Karabakh. *President Karimov's clear position helped, the conflict was successfully localized and smothered, and the outbreak of civil war was prevented.*⁴⁷

The sanctity of borders and the non-permissibility of territorial modifications were also stressed in the Bishkek conference held on 23 April 1992, where the five heads of republics agreed to recognise the territorial integrity of one another as well as the inviolability of their borders.⁴⁸ In the words of Sultan Akimbekov, Director of the Institute for World Economy and Politics (Almaty, Kazakhstan),

in the early 1990s there was an understanding of not trying to change the borders. Borders was the element of stability, it gave the possibility to make the situation unchangeable, unchangeable! And borders gave also legitimacy, not just under former Soviet law, but also from the international community [sic].⁴⁹

The process of the 'construction of Central Asia' continued well after the independence of the five republics, and proceeded also along multilateral lines. One of the most important meetings, as far as the creation of the region is concerned, was that in Tashkent on 27 February 1993. This multilateral event (with the participation of Turkmenistan as well) was indicative of the same feelings that were present in 1990 and 1991: hostility and resentment towards Russia, need to form a coherent position towards the management of the CIS, institutionalisation of regional politics under the umbrella of sovereignty, diplomacy and international law to allow the republics to survive the difficult transition from a unified politico-economic system to one anarchic made up of sovereign states. According to contemporary sources,

A split is widening in the former Soviet Union between the democratising ferment of the Russian-dominated west and

47 Interfax Russian News, 14 October 1994.

48 Russian Press Digest, 24 April 1992. The *uti possidetis* principle in Central Asia was then 'internationalised' by submitting to the UN the Declaration on the Inviolability of Frontiers, doc. A/48/304-S/26290, 11 August 1993.

49 Interview with the author, 20 November 2013. In this respect, insightful are the words of Zhar Zhardykhon, Professor of International Relations at KIMEP University: 'In Central Asia, border change would break the rules of the game. At the interstate level, at the international law level, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, any other Central Asian countries would not accept border change. No annexation, no irredentism, [...] this is how problems are solved'. Interview, Almaty, Kazakhstan, November 15, 2013. Another interviewee stressed that 'We have some principles...principles that...are showed towards others, that borders can't be changed. It's very important for us'. Interview with Rustam Burnashev, Professor of International Relations at the Kazakh-German University of Almaty, Kazakhstan, 16 November 2013.

conservative, old-style Central Asia, where five potentially well-off Muslim states are reluctantly preparing to strike out on a path of their own. Crippled by imported rouble inflation, suspicious of Moscow's intentions and left out of decisions by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Central Asia has reason to be unhappy. Speaking of Russia, the Uzbekistan President, Islam Karimov said that to one of his main newspapers, *Pravda of the East*, "in this days and age, you don't invade with swords and horses. But there are civilised methods no less aggressive and effective."⁵⁰

Putting aside antagonisms, the leaders said they would now work together for regional security, better economic ties, a shared television station, a joint newspaper and to help save the drying Aral Sea. Karimov argued that 'Central Asian states are traditional neighbours, which share a common culture, traditions, language, and they will go their way. This is without doubt', while Akaev, following Nazarbayev, expressed his preference for a Central Asian format rather than an ineffective CIS one and Ednan Karabayev, Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan, declared that the meeting 'hit the mark'. In addition, Central Asian leaders declared uncomfortable with the democratic outpouring in Russia and the national-democratic government in Azerbaijan, the sixth Muslim republic of the former Soviet Union.⁵¹

Contrary to what it is usually believed and argued, it was in this meeting at Tashkent (and not in Ashgabat) that Kazakhstan officially accepted for the first time that it was fully part of the region with Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and the new government of Tajikistan.⁵²

Summing up the atmosphere of the regional summit, Ahmadjan Loukmanov, Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry spokesman, said:

Our roots are one, our languages similar, our religion the same. The Soviet Union cut us into five pieces. These five states will remain. But relations should be as strong between them as one state. Tactics may differ, but the strategy is one.⁵³

50 *The Independent* (London) 27 February 1993.

51 *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 7 January 1993, 'Tashkent porodil dobre nadezhdy chuvstvuya lokot' drug druga'; *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 22 January 1993, 'A. Akaev: "Sudya po itogam goda zhizni Sodruzhestva, ono nichevo konstruktivno uzhe ne mozhet dat'...nado izmenit' evo formu"'.
52 Mokhira Suyarkulova argued that 'there was a meeting in Almaty in 1989 and the term [Central Asia] was used to identify a bloc within the USSR'. Yet, I could not find other sources to back this information. Interview, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, November 29, 2013.

53 *The Independent* (London) 27 February 1993.

The same diplomat, however, downplayed the attempt of Central Asia to radically cut off themselves from Russia:

The January meeting did not make a new Turkestan. It is not yet even a Central Asian common market, though we want that. We are still part of the CIS.

Thus, realistic considerations on political, economic and security concerns (especially towards Islamic radicalism potentially spilling over from Tajikistan and Afghanistan) did not lead to abruption, but only to soft detachment.

The process of building some kind of regional coordination and solidarity was thus advancing on the lines of protection of Westphalian sovereignty, diplomacy and international law. While economic and security ties with Moscow were acknowledged (Burnashev 2002; Rumer 2002), the Central Asian states were determined to carve out their own regional space to implement more viable policies of development.⁵⁴

At the Tashkent meeting, an agreement was reached on working out a concrete mechanism for regularly monitoring the implementation of interstate and intergovernmental treaties and agreements. The participants unanimously agreed that it would be a good idea to hold meetings of the region's heads of state and government on a regular basis, thus reinforcing the institution of summitry.

The identity of the region was still revolving around the notions of abandonment and marginalisation. Still in 1993 during a press conference the five presidents argued against the fact that

certain people are very keen to see us as younger brothers, as in the past. How else can one explain the fact that the Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan are still in ignorance of the reasons for the transfer of the Minsk meeting of heads of the CIS? ⁵⁵

This feeling of abandonment by the former master, Russia, continued to pervade the Central Asian region for all the year 1993, and this led to the adoption of concrete decision that were finally translated to deeds from papers. While there was talk about the creation of a Central Asian common economic space (which would have been

54 Current Digest of the Russian Press, The (formerly The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press), No. 1, Vol.45, February 03, 1993, page(s): 3-4; Current Digest of the Russian Press, The (formerly The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press), No. 1, Vol.45, February 03, 1993, page(s): 5-5; Current Digest of the Russian Press, The (formerly The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press), No. 1, Vol.45, February 03, 1993, page(s): 1-1.

55 Mayak Radio, Moscow, 4 Jan 1993.

made more concrete from 1994 onward), Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan agreed for example to introduce their currencies simultaneously to avoid additional shocks caused by the 'ousting' from the rouble zone.⁵⁶ According to Karimov and Nazarbayev, the forcible ousting of the Central Asian countries from the rouble zone is a directly opposite process damaging the historical ties of these nations with Russia.⁵⁷

The two presidents also signed a package of agreements on their countries' mutual commitments and support, on bilateral economic and trade cooperation in 1994, and a protocol on the intergovernmental program of bringing closer the economies of the Central Asian states until the year 2000.

Two other experiments of regional coordination took place before the more substantive Central Asian Union. In 1991, the five states set up the Inter Country Advisory Council republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, while in January 1993 the Commission Branch for grain, cotton, energy, water and other resources was launched in Tashkent. Both experiences, however, remained on paper and did not have any significant development (Pyadukhov 2000). All in all, this perception as marginalised and abandoned, paired with solidarist attitudes in overcoming the material difficulties caused by the end of the Soviet experience led to the creation of the CAU.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 14 January 1994. All pictures and articles from 'Slovo Kyrgyzstana' are archival material found at the Bayalina Library in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Permission obtained for all the material present in the thesis.

⁵⁶ Kommersant 11 November 1993, p. 3, in Russian Press Digest November 11, 1993.

⁵⁷ Russian Press Digest 11 November, 1993.

4.4 The realisation of the secondary institutions

After several coordinative and consultative meetings, on July 8, 1994, the three leaders of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan agreed to form an interstate council with a permanent executive committee based in Alma Ata, and move toward closer political and economic integration. This new organisation was called Central Asian Union (CAU).



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 18 June 1994.

There was a mimicking logic in this. The Central Asian states, weak in political, economic and environmental terms, were looking for an organisational model that could somehow restore the previous inter-linkages and commonality of resources, instead of relying on their own resources which were limited and, were existing, of difficult extraction.

The international context may help to reinforce this hypothesis. As a matter of fact, regional solutions at the beginning of the 1990s were the norm within the international system. A quick glance at the regional projects throughout the world will make it easier to understand why the Central Asian states, while adopting different state and societal institutions, tried to embark on a project which had integration as its own cornerstone.

In 1989 APEC and the free-trade area between Canada and the US were

established (which in 1994 with Mexico became NAFTA); in 1991, the OAU set to create an African economic community by 2025, and the OECS between Caribbean states and Latin America was founded; in 1992, ASEAN countries decided to set up a free trade zone, while in 1993 the European Single Market was launched.⁵⁸ For example, commenting on these regional experiments in the world, Rustam Burnashev recalled that ‘from the world, especially the EU, we had a very important message, “integration is the end”. In our states, at that time, that message was very meaningful, “you need integration, integration is good”. And you know, we had many common problems, so why not?’⁵⁹

The defining institutional features of the Central Asian Union were the following:

- the presence of a permanent interstate council with an executive committee;
- the setting up of a Central Asian Bank of Cooperation and Development, with a founding capital of \$3 million from each state;
- a memo on migration to allow free movement between the three states, and discussed ways of implementing the free trade agreement signed by them earlier this year which calls for free movement of goods, capital and labour;
- three separate councils of prime ministers, foreign and defence ministers to discuss economic issues, coordinate foreign policy, and work toward preserving stability in the region (Pyadukhov 2000).

This organisation has been highly criticised in the literature for being mere paraphernalia of the Central Asian authoritarian regimes, being ineffective and

58 In a letter to the Interstate Council of the CAU, Turdakun Usubalev, Kyrgyz MP, asked ‘Our peoples have never been indifferent to each other. Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Turkmens have lived for centuries as neighbours and brothers. Can we forget that our peoples have much in common in their history, way of living, traditions and customs, great similarity of material and spiritual culture and language? [...] Dear Presidents, why do not our states use the experience of the European Union?’ Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 31 October – 1 November, 1995, ‘Kak podelit’ granitsami dushi narodov?’.

59 Interview with the author, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 16 November 2013. Other accounts mention this: interview with Shairbek Juraev, independent analyst, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 28 November 2013; Interview with a Central Asian representative of the UNRCCA, Central Asian capital, 29 November, 2013; interview with Payam Foroughi, Researcher at the OSCE Academy, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 30 November 2013; interview with Emil Juraev, Professor and Analyst of International Relations, AUCA, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 2 December 2013.

essentially non-cooperative in nature (Olcott 1994b; Kubicek 1997; Allison 2008). However, an international society approach to it may reveal some important aspects.

To begin, we should recognise that the experience of Central Asian regionalism is even more interesting to analyse and research if we consider the general trend of cooperation/conflict within the CIS. As Yulia Nikitina rightly argues (2013:1), disintegration and not integration was the main objective of the vast majority of the states forming the CIS. Moreover, the integration of the Central Asian republics is even more noteworthy if we consider that the period 1991-1994 in the CIS was characterized by a sharp inter-state, intra-and inter-ethnic conflicts (Azerbaijan and Armenia, in Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Tajikistan).

Furthermore, the news of the newly created Union was a shock for all post-Soviet politics. The CAU was thus the first, substantive attempt to pursue regional cooperation and integration, and it tried to do so specifically relying on a Central Asian *we-feeling* detached from the rest of the CIS.⁶⁰ Cooperation was intended to be in economic and military terms. ‘The most important thing is that [...] we three countries have created an economic and defence union’ said Nazarbayev. ‘[This] is only the first step and we will go further but you can only imagine how far that will be’, he added. Diplomats said the new bloc was aimed at strengthening the former Soviet region's bargaining power with Russia, and was a move to pool economic resources.⁶¹

At least at a declarative level, integration was proceeding smoothly. Islam Karimov, with the visiting foreign ministers of the neighbouring republics of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Kasymzhomart Tokayev and Roza Otunbayeva, made significant references to ‘Turan’ and ‘distant past’ to describe the friendly nature of Central Asian interstate relations:

The good-neighbourly relations of friendship and cooperation between the peoples living on the ancient soil of Turan go back to the distant past [...] Their cultural and spiritual unity provides an opportunity to develop this cooperation to the full in various sectors of the national economy.⁶²

60 Alibek Dzhekshekulov, Deputy Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan, argued that the CAU was not a threat to the CIS, but that was undeniable that the cultural, economic and ‘spiritual’ similarities between the countries made diplomacy, dialogue and cooperation between them more efficient. Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 30 January 1997, ‘Tsentrāl’naya Aziya: potentsial integratsii’.

61 The Guardian, 9 July 1994.

62 Uzbek Television Third Channel 2 November 1995.

The Union was a highly formalised body. It consisted of an inter-committee of the presidents of the three founding members, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, as well as an inter-committee of the Prime Ministers of the same states. The increasing solidarity of the three states was the natural ending point of the intensive phase of cooperation that preceded the agreement before 1994: cooperation over the war in Tajikistan (see next section), common positions *vis-à-vis* Russia and perception of commonality of fate all drew the three state to overcome their pluralist stances and to push for a solidarist experiment.

A non-participant in this solidarist experiment was Turkmenistan, who had since independence begun to reiterate its status as a neutral state. Therefore, the participation of Turkmenistan was only visible in those meeting where cooperation on economic and political issues was absent from the talks.

However, despite the proclaimed solidarism, strong pluralist elements underpinned the functioning of the CAU. In its founding Charter, we read that

The activities of the Inter-State Council and its institutions are carried out on the basis of mutual recognition and respect for state sovereignty, equality and non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for human rights and freedoms and the conscientious fulfilment of its obligations and norms of international law.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 12 July 1994.

Alongside the decision to create a single economic space in Central Asia it was decided to create a Central Asian Bank, with the aim of financing common regional projects aimed at increasing the economic viability and the investment attractiveness of the region. The need for the bank stemmed out of ‘recognizing the need for the organization and implementation of multilateral inter-state settlement of trading, non-trading and other transactions.’⁶³ The very word ‘recognising’ indicates, indeed, the conscious will of the states to coordinate and ordinate their mutual economic relations.⁶⁴

The Bank had a defined structure as well. The supreme body was the general meeting of the bank shareholders (Assembly of Representatives). Governing body of the bank was the Bank Council, which included one authorized representative of the Parties, the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Inter-State Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan and the President of the Central Bank Cooperation and Development.⁶⁵ Article 3 of the statute of the Bank explained the functions:

- the organization and implementation of multilateral settlement of interstate trade and other transactions provided by intergovernmental agreements;
- to assist in the organization of joint ventures and expansion of their activity, regardless of ownership;
- crediting the strategic programs of the Parties;
- financing of a region-wide use;
- study and analysis of the economy of the Parties and to prepare proposals and recommendations of the banks of the Parties.

This regional experiment led to some improvement in the economic condition of the region. Far from being ineffective, the Bank in fact financed a number of major joint projects. Its activity required, in 1996, a recapitalisation of \$9 million due to the large activities implemented (Pyadukhov 2000: 5).⁶⁶

63 Soglashenie mezhdru Respublikoj Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzskoi Respublikoi i Respublikoi Uzbekistan ob uchrezhdenii Tsentral’noaziatskogo, 1994, preamble.

64 Bazanov, president of the Bank, argued that the main problems in coordinating economic policies were with Uzbekistan given the government’s tight control on the currency and liquidity. The also stress, though, that the Bank had institutional relations with all Central Asian central banks, also Turkmen and Tajik. Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 26-27 December 1995, ‘Vmeste s bankom budem vmeste’.

65 Article 1.2.

66 Mambetov, deputy chairman of the executive committee of the CAU, argued that the projects

A few years later, asked on the efficacy of the CAU as an experiment of integration, as an incubator of agreement and consensus among the parties and as an effective political-economic mechanism of regional governance, Nazarbayev replied

The Central Asia Union is a working entity. We have the Central Asian Bank. Each of the three states has a deposit in it, 9 million dollars. The bank attracts up to 100 million dollars in investment and 52 projects in three states are currently being implemented, including the Sea of Aral. And it does not hinder anyone, it contributes to trust among the neighbours and to stability in our states. So, replying to your question, I must say that some CIS states feel that the formation of twos and fours is not good for the CIS. But everybody is entitled to have his own opinion.⁶⁷

1997 was a year in which the solidarist impetus received new lifeblood. In January, during a meeting in Bishkek, the three presidents signed a Treaty of Eternal Friendship among their countries, thus diplomatically and legally enhancing the cooperative character of the CAU. It was the first treaty of this kind in the whole CIS.⁶⁸

financed by the Bank were more than fifty, and that this was possible also thanks to the institutionalisation of meetings of economic analysts and specialists from the three CAU countries. Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 3-4 May 1996, 'Edinoe ekonomicheskoe prostranstvo. Realii i perspektivy'.

67 Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast 22 January 1998.

68 Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 27-28 December 1996, 'Sosedstvo – dobroe; druzhba – vechnaya'; Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 14-15 January 1997, 'Obshie interesy pod krylom vечноj druzhby'.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 16-17 January 1996.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 16-17 January 1996.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 3-4 May 1996.

The tones of this treaty are highly solidarist, emphasising mutual support in the prevention of territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence (Article 2); joint defence measures against external attacks (Article 3) and coordination on regional and international issues (Article 4). According to the Uzbek political scientist Farkhod Tolipov, the spirit and letter of the Treaty ‘On Eternal Friendship’ in fact described a strategic partnership, an alliance, and a strategy for integration (Tolipov 2006: 178; Tolipov 2013). In addition, the presidents reviewed the performance of the CAU in terms of intra-regional trade development, noting that over the last two years (1994-1996), the combined volume of trade within the group had almost doubled despite political difficulties.⁶⁹

In March, the three presidents and prime ministers met again in Bishkek to review the current phases of the integration project and to sign new agreements, such as agreements on the free movement of workers, broader integration of anti-monopoly policies and other documents. Akaev noted that

⁶⁹ Rabochaya Tribuna, 17 January 1997.

The Central Asian union has passed from words to deeds [...] Trade turnover between the three nations doubled last year, a sign that our union is working very successfully.⁷⁰

At the meeting, an innovation in the field of regional communication was also decided. The Prime Ministers of Kazakhstan (Kajegeldin), Kyrgyzstan (Djumagulov) and Uzbekistan (Sultanov) on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Interstate Council of the CAU jointly decided to publish the magazine 'Central Asia: problems of integration'.⁷¹

This is something that even the EU did not have at that time. It was a monthly magazine, and while the main editorial office was located in Tashkent, two other offices were opened in Astana and Bishkek. The journal was published in Uzbek, Kazakh and Kyrgyz as well as Russian.

With respect to the merits of this initiative, two things are noteworthy. Firstly, the creation of a monthly publication showed once more the intention of Central Asian governments to try to mutually adjust their national policies in terms of economic development and modernisation, presenting problems and plausible solutions to problems of integration with the help of experts and academics.

Secondly, from an ES perspective, it showed how there was an attempt, albeit unsuccessful, to include in the process of integration the Central Asian *world society*, i.e. the peoples, the businesses, the economic circles and the relevant economic actors that played a role in the economic integration of these countries. The expenditures of its production and printing were so divided:

- Kazakhstan - 35 %;
- Kyrgyzstan - 20 %
- Uzbekistan - 45 % of total expenditure, other than expenditure undertaken by the Republic of Uzbekistan for the organization of the publisher.

The first paragraph of the editorial concept of the magazine clearly stated that

By creating a monthly magazine, the founding states are confident in the ability of this publication to promote a mutual understanding of the most pressing questions of the relationship between them,

⁷⁰ Associated Press Worldstream, 14 March 1997.

⁷¹ Reshenie Soveta Prem'er-ministrov Mezhtosudarstvennovo soveta Respubliki Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzskoj Respubliki i Respubliki Uzbekistan 'O zhurnale "Tsentral'naya Aziya: problemy integratsii"'.

which meets the interests of the peoples living in these states.⁷²

§ 3 clearly stated the solidarist aim of the project, again, fostering cooperation in the information, cultural and editorial spheres. According to the concept and therefore to the governments of the CAU,

the basis of the information policy is to promote the development and strengthening of the information space of a new kind, where the binding force would serve the shared interest of the founders of the magazine in the economic, cultural and information cooperation.

The aim was reiterated also in the Charter of the Magazine (§ 2.1), where it was written that the aims were

- enhancement of the information support of economic integration of the founders;
- uniform representation on the pages of materials reflecting the close cooperation between the Central Asian countries in different areas of life.

Yet, pluralist elements were, as we discussed above, always underlying the solidarist logic, and for all the talks about integration and solidarity, territorial, ethnic and survival concerns were paramount also in this kind of cooperation.

As a matter of fact, the closure of § 3 of the concept clearly stated that the publication of ‘materials which by their nature are aimed at inciting the population of any territory to acts incompatible with the process of integration’ was forbidden, thus warning contributors from the three states to write or discuss hot topics (such as territorial claims, definition of borders and inter-ethnic strives) which could have led to the potential disruption not just of the integration process, but of regional stability as a whole.

Nonetheless, the process of integration was slowing down, and disappointment caught the members of the Interstate Council. According to members of the Interstate Council, the main reasons were that there were no major sources of capital investment, the lack of realism in the projects, in the unresolved issues of mutual convertibility of national currencies and the slow creation of the legal framework of a single economic space (Pyadukhov 2000).

Well conveying the idea of solidarism and pluralism simultaneously at play, Alibek

⁷² Kontsepsiya ezhemesyachnovo zhurnala ‘Tsentral’naya Aziya: problemy integratsii’.

Dzhekshekulov, Deputy Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan, argued that

[Central Asian states] are far from being able to paint an idyllic picture of relations between states. In terms of variable-speed transition countries in the region to a market economy affect the existing variety of natural, financial, demographic and other resources. There is unevenness of development, each country is seeking its way.⁷³

Subsequently, after another meeting of Heads of State in July 1997 in Cholpon-Ata (Kyrgyzstan), in order to approximate national legislation and the creation of a common legal mechanisms of integration, it was decided to establish the Council of Parliamentarians of the three states, and the process of integration re-gained momentum.

The speed at which the three republics integrated their efforts to create better economic conditions in the region was once again compared by the press to the ‘inefficiency’ of the CIS, and this once again raises at least some questions about the mere declarative character of Central Asian integration. In the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, the Cholpon-Ata summit of July 1997 was summarised as follows:

Integration within the Central Asian Union has been developing much faster than within the framework of the CIS, the author notes. Largely, this is due to the substantial preparatory work. And what is most important, all decisions in the Union are adopted by way of consensus. [...] [E]conomic integration within the Central Asian Union will pave the way for strengthening the military-political ties between the members. [...] The Foreign Ministers of the three Central Asian republics have discussed the question of creating a nuclear-free zone in that region, and this initiative is expected to be tabled in the United Nations. On the last day of the summit [July 26], Presidents Nursultan Nazarbayev, Islam Karimov and Askar Akaev are to sign a whole package of agreements aimed at raising mutual relations between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to a higher level and intensifying integration processes within the framework of the Central Asian Union.⁷⁴

Economic problems in particular those over gas and electricity supplies and payments were also discussed at the meeting, and this is again a sign of a working international society: settlement of the disagreements was conducted via consensus and diplomacy, and new payment plans were set up following the agreement of the three leaders.

73 Slovo Kyrgyzstana, January 30, 1997, ‘Tsentral’naya Aziya: potentsial integratsii’.

74 Russian Press Digest, 24 July 1997.

The Afghan conflict and the possible repercussions on the weak Tajik neighbour were also part of the meeting, and this led to the intensification of military cooperation among the republics. The solidarity among them was therefore on the rise. Indeed, there was a clear perception of the need of regional unity to preserve sovereignty, stability and political survival. Incidentally, Russia was not mentioned and was not part of the talks:

The development of Afghanistan's military conflict largely reflects the degree of security across the entire Central Asia and requires more political activity from countries in the region, Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Muratbek Imanaliyev [said]. Karimov and his counterparts, Askar Akaev of Kyrgyzstan and Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan will also be discussing the status of a Central Asian peacekeeping battalion and a planned inter-parliamentary union, the Kyrgyz ministry said.⁷⁵

Showing commonality of minds and similarity of positions, pushing for a peaceful and diplomatic solutions to the Afghan conflict, the Central Asian states proposed to host in Bishkek an international peace conference under the auspices of the UN, thus showing once again their preference and therefore adoption of the institution of diplomacy for the resolution of conflicts, both regional and extra-regional.⁷⁶

Quite interestingly, from an *ES world society* perspective, the meeting was preceded by a forum of intellectuals and exponents of civil society ('Forum of Central Asian Culture'), where it was demanded that processes of regionalism and pursuance of different national interests should have been reconciled on the basis of 'peace, harmony and agreement' between the peoples. In this respect, Kyrgyzstan launched the magazine 'Central Asia and the Culture of Peace', and it was stressed that the regionalisation of this idea could have been a factor of integration and stability.⁷⁷

1998 was a decisive year for the CAU, as it expanded its boundaries in terms of membership and almost comprehended the whole Central Asian region under its umbrella (with the exception of Turkmenistan who, as we saw, remained out the solidarist circle while approaching the Central Asian international society in its pluralist dimension).

⁷⁵ Associated Press Worldstream 24 July 1997.

⁷⁶ Xinhua News Agency, 24 July 1997; Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 25-26 July 1997, 'Mezhtossovet ukreplyaet integratsyu'.

⁷⁷ Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 18-19 July 1997, 'Tsentral'naya Aziya – zemlya mira, soglasiya i tolerantnosti: vzglyad iz Kyrgyzstana'.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzystana, 19 March 1998. Archival material found at the Bayalina Library in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

At the end of the civil war, which left behind it some 50,000 killed and 500,000 refugees only in the 1992-1993 period (Horsman 1999: 38), ruined infrastructures and left a moribund economy, Tajikistan's political and economic environment was devastated.

Following contemporary world trends, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter, it was believed that joining a multi-lateral organisation whose focus was the integration of markets was the panacea for all the evils.

The Tajik government expressed its desire to join the Union already in 1996. As a matter of fact, the Tajik government was admitted as observer (together with Russia) at the Alma-Ata meeting on 23 August.⁷⁸ One year later, it was the Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Muratbek Imanaliyev who expressed desire for the Tajik government to formally upgrade its position within the Union to full-fledged membership. Imanaliyev said the Kyrgyz leadership was 'extremely interested that Tajikistan should become a participant in the implementation of projects within the framework of the Central Asian union'. He also expressed confidence that there

⁷⁸ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 26 August 1996.

would be no obstacles to Tajikistan's participation in the Central Asian peacekeeping battalion, established by Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.⁷⁹



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 9-10 January 1998. The meeting, held in Ashgabat, paved the way to Tajikistan's accession to the CAU and formalised Turkmenistan's status as observer. The Ashgabat Declaration, emphasising convergence of foreign policies and respect of international law in regional matters, was signed. Russia was not informed of the meeting.

Once all the paperwork was formalised and guarantees on the stability of the country had been given to the other members, Tajikistan was formally accepted during the CAU meeting in Tashkent as the fourth member of the CAU on 27 March 1998. The Protocol on the accession of the Republic of Tajikistan to the Treaty the creation of a single economic space between the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan on 30 April 1994 was signed.

⁷⁹ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 21 October 1997.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 31 March 1998. Archival material found at the Bayalina Library in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

At the press conference following the ceremony of signature of documents, the presidents of all four republics described the admission of Tajikistan to this economic agreement as an important historical event. Islam Karimov said that ‘this event was the long-standing dream of the residents of the region.’⁸⁰ The usual reference to historical roots, commonality and to Central Asia as comprising all the CAU states was made after the meeting by the press secretary of the Tajik Presidency, Zafar Saidov:

this act is a serious foreign policy achievement by the head of state which meets vital interests of the entire people of Tajikistan in the difficult transitional period. It should be mentioned that the development of regional relations in the framework of the agreement is not a show of fashion or an invention. It is not an integration for the sake of integration, but is a natural and objective process which has deep historical roots.⁸¹

The solidarity expressed by Central Asian presidents made it possible to identify also Turkmenistan as part of Central Asia, giving him ‘regional titularity’. This attitude of seeing the region as comprising the five Central Asian republics is most evident in the words of Karimov:

⁸⁰ Tajik Radio first programme, Dushanbe, 27 March 1998.

⁸¹ BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, 30 March 1998.

Tomorrow Turkmenistan will hopefully join the organisation and the Central Asian region will be completely represented. [This unification] is not a tribute to the latest trends, not simply an organisation, not integration for the sake of integration. [Central Asian states] have common historical and spiritual roots and a common economic foundation that cannot be ignored.⁸²

Nonetheless, all four Central Asian states stressed that their particular historical, economic, environmental and cultural conditions were factors that allowed them to integrate far faster than the rest of the CIS. Indeed, the keenness and the promptness of the Central Asian leaders was perceived as a model for the whole continent. It was not uncommon to read in the press that the CAU was much more effective than the CIS, and that the CIS should have studied the experience of the CAU to improve its integrative potential.⁸³ As said, it is usually claimed that this organisation was only declarative in purpose, but in fact it showed unprecedented dynamism. Many meetings were held under its aegis, Tajikistan showed its willingness to join it and beyond consultations several projects were implemented.⁸⁴

Hindrances were present as well, however, and these may be related to the underlying pluralist character of the region. Diverging national interests, stronger emphasis on sovereignty and autonomous paths to development and effective political and economic independence hindered the progress of the solidarist trends, leading to conflicts and disagreements (with consequences on the effectiveness of the regional organisations). People working in regional politics or researching it at that time confirmed this as well, mentioning ‘ongoing, almost unconscious definitions of national interests, not always convergent’.⁸⁵

82 Interfax Russian News, 30 March 1998. Already in 1997, Dzhekshekulov, Deputy Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan, said ‘Non-participation in the Union of Turkmenistan, I think, is only temporary’. Slovo Kyrgyzstana, January 30, 1997, ‘Tsentral’naya Aziya: potentsial integratsii’.

83 See, e.g., Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 7-8 May 1996, ‘Soyus trekh nameren ukrepit’sya’; Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 18-19 March 1997, ‘Oni delo govorili’; Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 20-21 October 1997, ‘Labirint soyusov’.

84 RTR, ‘Vesti’ program, 18 March 1998; BBC Worldwide Monitoring 27 March 1998; Kazakhstanskaya Pravda in Agence France Presse – English, 27 March 1998.

85 E.g. interview with Uzbek Source 1 and Uzbek Source 2; interview with Roman Mogilevskii, Director of IPPA, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, November 26, 2013; interview with expert in Kyrgyzstan, November 27, 2013; interview with Zakir Chotaev, Assistant Director at the Central Asian Research Centre - Turkish Kyrgyz Manas University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, December 13, 2013; interview with two representatives of the Institute for Strategic and Regional studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Tashkent, location undisclosed, December 13, 2013; interview with Kamoluddin Abdullaev, January 15, 2014; interview with former Kyrgyz Diplomat.

This tension between solidarism and pluralism was indeed present in the minds of Central Asian presidents, and recognised as well. While on the one hand there was the attraction to more integration, uniformity and harmonisation from an economic and policy viewpoint, on the other hand there were the domestic, national peculiarities of each state member of the CAU, which were impeding the realisation of the solidarist goals in the economic field.

For example, the decision of Kyrgyzstan to unilaterally introduce its own currency, the *som*, let economic, fiscal and payment convergence derail. Fitting neatly with the pluralist/solidarist mixture explained above, the only Central Asian leader who defended Kyrgyzstan's action, Turkmenistan's Niyazov, argued that 'as the leader of a sovereign state, Akaev had the right to introduce a national currency unilaterally if he chose to do so' (Olcott 1994a: 39).⁸⁶ As Karimov said,

I would say that the first thing we need is political will on the part of each of us. The second thing: decisions will be decisions, the main thing today for us is that we have to get our legislative bases closer - without doing so we can not talk about full-blooded, full integration [...] the countries have their own parliaments to adopt laws, but to make the agreements work they need a single legal basis This is a very serious question. [...] Each country has its own economic development model but we should make efforts for the benefit of ordinary people, because agreements signed earlier are being discredited by bureaucrats.⁸⁷

The narrative of these secondary institutions as merely declarative, virtual and void in concreteness fail to appreciate the fact that these experiments were indeed realised. It is too difficult to follow up an institutions only for declarative purposes. Solidarist trends were indeed present, as reiterated by all the presidents and manifested in their willingness for economic cooperation. However, it was a solidarism that masked several pluralist tendencies, which clashed with desires for unity and cooperation. The tasks of nation-building, state-consolidation, regional stability and *de jure* independence/sovereignty from the former colonial power were too strong to fully accompany the regional integration processes.

⁸⁶ Here, it is interesting the testimony of Rustam Burnashev: 'At that time, I was working at the Institute of Regional Strategic Studies under the President in Tashkent, and I looked at the situation very closely. For Uzbekistan it was shock! [...] But in public, Karimov said it was fine, as it was a sovereign decision'. After that, however, borders were closed. Interview, November 16, 2013.

⁸⁷ Uzbek Radio first programme, Tashkent, 26 March 1998.

What should be surprising, conversely, is that actually those experiences had several manifestations and actually *duration*. One should remember, as a matter of fact, that while fully-fledged economic integration failed to be achieved among the republics, the CAU provided a forum, a hub for the diffusion of tensions, for the ‘concertation’ of actions (with respect to Tajikistan and Afghanistan, for example) and a provider of regional identity to maintain the appropriate autonomy with respect to Moscow (Zhardykhyan 2002: 180).

It is sufficient to remember that the CAU, despite its alleged ‘virtual’ character, was appropriately institutionalised in a manner that made the Central Asian republics sufficiently distinct from Moscow and the rest of the CIS. According to the decision of the three Heads of States in Cholpon Ata in 1997, the Meetings of the Board were held, as a rule, on the eve of the Summit of the CIS. In this way, the leaders of the Central Asian countries openly suggested that they aimed at developing joint positions on the issues submitted to the summits. In ES terms, this is a clear example of a concert *in fieri* (on the way of periodical institutionalisation) strengthened by the institutions of international law and diplomacy (with the derivative of summitry) in defence of a particular interpretation of another institution, that of sovereignty.

The instrument of consensus itself, which was the legal instrument adopted to resolve political conflicts within the CAU, while hindering cooperation by requiring unanimity, nonetheless has preserved the regional space and its stability by letting the leaders agree on those specific and vital issues on which there was common understanding (for example, again, the containment of the situation in Tajikistan).⁸⁸

Within the CAU, however, the solidarism expressed was in the common economic objectives and in the coordination of common stances on sovereignty *vis-à-vis* Russia and the Slavic components of the CIS, but nothing else. In point of fact, strong pluralist veins, underlined the regional project. National economic policies, for example, supposed to be convergent, were left under national decisions and directions.⁸⁹ Moreover, all the member states were, in their policies, clearly guided by

88 Interview with Kazakh Professor at KIMEP, Almaty, Kazakhstan, November 13, 2013; interview with Askar Nursha, independent Kazakh expert, Almaty, Kazakhstan, November 14, 2013; Interview with Rustam Burnashev.

89 An example of such hurdles was when Kazakh Prime Minister Nurlan Balgimgaev announced that Kazakhstan would impose heavy tariffs of up to 200% on some imports from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in March 1999 in face of massive influx of foreign goods into the country. A Kazakh

the provisions of the territorial integrity and inviolability of the existing borders that are specifically included in the texts of international treaties signed between 1992 and 1997 by leaders - members of the Interstate Council, thus preventing joint projects of supranational sovereignty or delegation of authoritative principles to other organs.

Another element of limited solidarism in Central Asia was more technical in character, but nonetheless is useful to understand the true character of international relations in the region. The states of the CAU, perhaps conscious of the challenging tasks ahead (if seen coupled with their national environments) limited every single agreement in time, as if they set phases renewable under more favourable conditions. Suffice to say that article 15 (to be paired with the preamble) of the treaty establishing a single economic space between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan was only for seven years (1994-2001), as if it left the decision to proceed further with integration only if integration met the desires of the founding members.⁹⁰ This, again, may be seen as a rejection of full-fledged solidarism in favour of a more conservative, pluralist position.

After having analysed the characteristics, the role and the institutionalisation of the CAU as a sign of international society in Central Asia, we can now turn to the effectiveness of the Central Asian international society with respect to three main events: the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997), the creation of a nuclear weapon free zone and the institution of a consortium for the Aral Sea.

4.5 The Tajik conflict and the regional actors

The military-security aspect of the Central Asian regional society was evident, I argue, also in the management of the Tajik civil war and in the containment of the Afghan conflict, seen as a menace for the whole region. The basic assumption of this section is that the containment and (where and when possible) the resolution of such conflicts required a concerted action (and therefore common interests and aims) from the regional actors and, wherever it was necessary, of the Great Powers operating in

official said the decision to increase the tax rate, although temporary, aimed to protect Kazakhstan's economic stability (Xinhua News Agency, 11 February 1999).

⁹⁰ According to Triska and Slusser (1962), the duration of an agreement is indicative of the level of confidence of the parties and their mutual trust. The shorter, the more cautious is the approach. There is nothing wrong in having short contracts, actually it is symptom of political realism and awareness, especially for newly independent states.

the region.

Common understandings among the Central Asian countries, manifested in concerted actions, meetings and words, can be seen as the operating facet of a regional international society aimed at the preservation of *stability* and *survival* in the region. As we will observe, there was a first phase where diplomacy and non-interference were the norms adopted in the region, to then turn to limited intervention and external Great Power management in the second phase of the conflict. Infringements of sovereignty led to quarrels between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and it will be interesting to see how discourses of justification proved the existence of a limited, but nonetheless present, normative framework of reference.

Already in January 1993, when the civil war in Tajikistan had been ongoing for nine months, the Central Asian states showed concerns for possible spillovers and regional instability coming from their neighbour. Non-interference and diplomacy were the norms adopted by the neighbouring republics, following the spirit of their previous regional agreements and fearing possible repercussions, should borders be violated.

At a summit in Tashkent in 1993, with the presence of Turkmenistan as well, the Central Asian republics the leaders expressed their ‘moral support for the constitutional authorities in Tajikistan’ and said they would provide ‘humanitarian aid in the form of food, medicine and clothes’ to the stricken republic, but nothing more.’⁹¹

Attempts to send auxiliary troops to restore order in the wrecked republic came to nothing, and declarations of regional and historical solidarity were paired with limited humanitarian aid. Significantly, however, the five republics did not oppose the presence of Russian troops on the Tajik soil, namely the motorised infantry division, thus *de facto* legitimising the presence of a foreign country’s army on a regional member’s soil. As President Yeltsin argued with reference to the Tajik conflict, ‘As a great power, Russia cannot permit a whole nation to perish.’⁹²

Thus, the institution of the Great Power management (henceforth GPM), theorised by Bull (1977: 202) as that condition by which Great Powers are acknowledged to have special interests and special privileges to maintain order within the international system found its place in the Central Asian normative scheme.

91 United Press International, 4 January 1993.

92 Interfax, 10 June 1993.

Central Asia was still too politically weak to dispense with what in the previous 60 years had been the provider of political and economic stability and, most of all, to create *its own indigenous version* of GPM⁹³.

Russia was the only power capable of sending hard power means and facilities in the former backyard to preserve the overall stability of the region, and this was tacitly accepted by the new independent states. Despite discourses on sovereign equality and strong *de jure* independence reiterated in the period of the creation of the CIS, GPM was clearly among the normative devices adopted by the Central Asian states to preserve their survival.

No declaration, no statement and no regional law was adopted against Russian presence in Tajikistan, as too evident was the necessity of having a powerful state in the war-torn neighbour. Non-interference of regional states and external GPM were therefore the normative instruments to prevent breaches of sovereignty and alteration of the precarious territorial *status quo* in the region.

As noted earlier when speaking of borders, non-interference, international law and a strong conception of sovereignty were also present in the mind of Islam Karimov when speaking of ‘breaking up’ the region. In this respect, from a normative viewpoint it is interesting to note what president Akaev said in Shimkent in a specific Central Asian summit on Tajikistan (14 April 1995) when asked about the possibility of sending troops to Tajikistan. He said that

any violence between Kyrgyz border guards and Tajik fighters would revive memories of the clashes between local people on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border in July 1989 over the right to use irrigation facilities in which one person was killed and 19 wounded. In comparison with the violence reported nowadays the one or two people who died in the local conflict then might seem insignificant, but someone might at any time recall the tragedy, bringing it to the fore. Therefore, no-one can tell what the relations between the neighbouring people will be like if someone decides to do so.⁹⁴

Among Central Asian states, diplomacy was still the main institution adopted for the management of the Tajik conflict. A conference in Alma Ata was proposed by

93 With the birth of regional international societies, GPM must be analysed in two ways: as ‘external’, i.e. where great powers present at the global level penetrate regional international societies, and as ‘internal’ or ‘indigenous’, i.e. where regional great powers legitimately manage regional politics. We will see in the next chapter that this dovetailed interpretation of this institution is very relevant to the Central Asian case.

94 ITAR-TASS news agency (World Service), Moscow, 15 April 1995.

Nazarbayev under the auspices of the UN and with the presence of other CIS countries. The military action was explicitly rejected in the joint communiqué at the end of the Shimkent meeting, where only mediation was offered.⁹⁵ In addition, they said the Tajik conflict could only be solved ‘by political dialogue and mutual compromises.’

When it became clear that without a military intervention the Tajik civil war would undermine the stability of the whole region, the Uzbek, Kazakh and Kyrgyz Presidents agreed on sending troops to a CIS-led battalion (read: Russia-led) aimed at countering the insurgence of the anti-government forces on the Tajik soil and preventing infiltrations of Islamic fundamentalists from the southern border with Afghanistan. However, the participation was extremely limited, and this shows how the solidarity expressed by the Central Asian leaders was more in words than in deeds, and how they stuck to a strong pluralist interpretation of international relations in the region. As James Sherr argued (1994: 59),

[a]lthough Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan each promised one battalion to reinforce the Tajik-Afghan border, Kazakhstan's Border Troops are 75 per cent Russian; Uzbekistan refuses to confirm whether its contingent has been dispatched, and Kyrgyzstan's battalion (originally designated a “special purpose brigade”) arrived at half its promised strength of 500, without weapons, or bullet-proof vests. What is more, Russian Border Troops - 50 per cent under-strength themselves - are now plugging holes in the Kyrgyz border post of Sary-Tash in order to compensate for Kyrgyzstan's “contribution”.

The reluctance of Central Asian states to send troops to validate their alleged ‘solidarity’ on the ground, especially of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, was exemplified in the vote that the Kyrgyz parliament expressed against sending more troops on the Tajik soil, and on the threat that both Nazarbayev and Karimov made to withdraw their battalions in case of failure of political negotiations.⁹⁶

What this shows, moreover, is that there is another subtle, normative difference between Russia and the Central Asian republics. Russia felt as its ‘moral right’, ‘duty’ to intervene in its ‘near abroad’ (Sherr 1994: 57-59; Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, adopted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 November 1992), while as we saw Central Asian states were at constant search of a

95 Interfax Russian News, 15 April 1995; Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 14 April 1995.

96 Interfax Russian News, 6 June 1995.

diplomatic, multilateral solution of the conflict avoiding blatant intervention.

Yet, with respect to the intervention/non-intervention issue, the role of Uzbekistan was more ambiguous, and put considerable pressure on the Central Asian normative framework for the resolution of the Tajik civil war.

In an effort to enhance its regional influence, Uzbekistan vowed to help Tajikistan and at least initially committed to the Central Asian principle of non-intervention⁹⁷ (Horsman 1999: 38). Yet, it has been widely noted how Tashkent, worried about the possible spread of Islamic fundamentalism, made numerous interventions on the Tajik soil to counterfight rebels and to provide assistance to Rahmonov's government, empowering his side with new weapons and military support (Gleason 1997b; Horsman 1999). A curious case was that the defence minister of the Tajik government, Major General Alexander Shishlyannikov, was born in Tashkent.

The fact that while other Central Asian countries (such as Kyrgyzstan) did protest about this persistent violation of Tajikistan's sovereignty, Tajikistan itself subsequently declared itself grateful⁹⁸ for the help of the Uzbek brother (the raid was legitimised by an inter-republic air defence agreement, see Horsman 1999: 39). This is evidence of the delicate balance between the principal norm of sovereignty and non-intervention and the particularities of the contingent situation, which sometimes leads statesmen to defy norms and commonly accepted institutions to preserve the greater good of survival and stability. Karimov's reiterated appeals to the urgency of the situation, the danger coming from it and the risk of a regional collapse sound exactly like those justificatory discourses that make reference to the validity of a breached norm in cases of emergency.⁹⁹

Uzbek interference in Tajikistan changed from legitimate to illegitimate over the years. Towards the end of the decade, two incidents are salient. Firstly, there were allegations that the Uzbek military helped Tajik renegade commander Mahmud

97 'It is impossible to solve these problems by force', said Karimov, adding: 'force will only lead to increased tensions in the near future.' Agence France Presse – English, 29 July 1993.

98 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23 February 1993; in addition, Rahmonov later described Karimov as 'a father to the people of Kulyab and to the entire Tajik people'.

99 Yet, it is interesting to note Uzbekistan's two-month long refusal to sign the Tewzan Protocol in April 1997, as a guarantor of Tajikistan's post-war peace. Karimov argued that Uzbekistan was not prepared to take on this role, suggesting that this was responsibility of Russia, the USA or the EU. This raises interesting questions about Uzbekistan's concerns for Tajikistan's sovereignty, as well as about the presence (or not) of an indigenous GPM in Central Asia.

Khudoyberdiyev against the government of Rahmonov. This was perceived as an act of interference in the territory of an independent sovereign country. Immediately, however, the Uzbek government rejected the allegations, claiming to stick to the principle of sovereignty and non-intervention.¹⁰⁰ The Uzbek Foreign Ministry stated that ‘the Uzbek leadership is committed to the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of neighbouring Tajikistan. This is the official point of view of Tashkent’.

In November 1998, President Emomali Rahmonov accused neighbouring Uzbekistan of training Tajik rebels and aiding in anti-government raids, claiming that ‘it is an aggression on the part of a neighbouring state. [...] Uzbekistan has been interfering in our internal affairs for six years now. We have enough facts and proof to appeal to international organizations.’ Once again, Uzbek authorities denied allegations.¹⁰¹

Secondly, one year later, when Tajikistan was believed to host Islamist guerrillas on borders with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the latter conducted bombing raids in the neighbouring country, spurring Bishkek’s and Dushanbe’s reactions. This event, again, was a clear example of the violation of a norm of a society. On 15 August 1999, Uzbek warplanes attacked targets in the southern mountainous area some 15 km from the Tajik border. While the targets were believed to be in Kyrgyzstan, the warplanes entered Tajik territory specifically in Tajikistan’s Jirgatal District in a breach of sovereignty.

Initially, the Uzbek government denied any allegations, and Uzbek officials denied taking part in the raids. Fyodor Banin, a spokesman for Uzbek defence ministry, stated that ‘it would be stupid to run after this small group of people, chasing them in airplanes and bombing. Such a military operation is not being conducted’. However, as the targets were believed to be terrorists, the Uzbek Foreign minister Abdulaziz Kamilov then spoke of a ‘mistake’ but justified his state’s actions claiming that ‘when we speak about an act of international terrorism, we consider it justified to undertake adequate measures.’¹⁰² The word ‘justified’ itself denotes the presence of the violation of a commonly accepted norm of international conduct.

The Tajik reaction was quick to come: Tajik Foreign Minister

100 Interfax Russian News, 27 October 1997.

101 Associated Press Worldstream, 12 November 1998.

102 Associated Press Worldstream, 17 August 1999.

Talbak Nazarov handed over a diplomatic note to the Uzbek ambassador in Tajikistan, Bakhtiyor Erjafhev, in Dushanbe on Monday 16 August in connection with the Uzbek air force raid. The incident was solved diplomatically. The head of the Tajik Foreign Ministry's Information Department, Igor Sattarov, speaking of 'bewilderment' for an 'unprecedented fact', said that during the conversation, which had taken place behind closed doors, the Tajik side expressed its surprise at 'this action by the Uzbek air force which cannot be justified by anything' and demanded that 'Tashkent take urgent steps to prevent such things from taking place in the future since they were at variance with principles and nature of relations that have developed between the two countries and in the region.'¹⁰³ In the end, the circumstances were clarified, and the incident was solved.

This small incident shows, however, that even if the Uzbek interference in the Tajik conflict was a violation of the sovereignty of an independent country, it was a legitimate one determined by the gravity of circumstances, which were putting at stake the survival of Tajik statehood.¹⁰⁴ Help from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, albeit limited, showed that while non-interference was the norm, breaches of sovereignty were justified in the name of the greater good of order and survival of the region. However, the prompt diplomatic vehemence of the Tajik government in reply to a mistaken attack that left no casualties and that killed only some cattle signified that the institution of sovereignty was well internalised, and re-affirmed the pillar on which the region built its order.

By looking at the wider management of the Tajik conflict, *contra* Olcott's predictions of an apocalyptic scenario featuring even full-scale invasion from Uzbekistan (1994a: 44), its solution relied on diplomacy, international law and the derivatives of multilateralism and summitry. The rounds of negotiations that led to the UN-backed General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan on 27 June 1997 were the product of diplomatic and multilateral efforts enhanced and in some cases promoted by Central Asian states themselves. It is sufficient to recall that it was Karimov who appealed to the UN Secretary General in September 1992, thus *de facto* starting the UN involvement in the conflict.

¹⁰³ Interfax Russian News, 16 August 1999.

¹⁰⁴ That Uzbek interference in the Tajik conflict was broadly considered as legitimate in Central Asia was confirmed in several interviews with Kazakh and Kyrgyz experts and foreign-policy makers, arguing that intervention broke a regional norm (non-interference) exactly with the intent to re-establish it.

During the diplomatic process of reconciliation between the government of Tajikistan and the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan offered mediation and conciliatory presence. Askar Akaev even conducted *bona officia* using personal contacts among the parties which led to the Agreement on the Protocol on Political Issues in Bishkek, May 1997,¹⁰⁵ while the Turkmen president Niyazov and his Foreign Minister Sikhmuradov participated in person in the three rounds of talks in Ashgabat.

This shows how the doctrine of positive did not cut Turkmenistan off from the regional aspect of international relations, but actually allowed it to serve as a platform, as a participant in the pluralist aspects of it, such as those aimed at maintaining the survival, the coexistence and the stability of the region. Akbarsho Iskandarov, who served as ambassador to Turkmenistan at that time, remembered that

Turkmenistan, keeping a neutral position, created all favourable conditions to make these negotiations [between the parties] successful. The negotiations were vital for the Tajik nation. Turkmenistan provided accommodation, technical means, computer equipment, transport and etc. We held two more rounds of negotiations in Turkmenistan later. During the negotiations opposing parties adopted mutually acceptable agreements on the ways to settle the inter-Tajik conflict. The most important thing was that we agreed on ceasing fire and any hostilities. Thus, the Ashgabat talks broke the ice of mistrust and enmity and got a long negotiation process closer to a successful end' (Dubrovin undated).

The institution of summitry was visible in the several meetings held in Central Asia to solve the conflict, also with the participation of delegates of the OSCE and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) delegates: IV Round in Almaty, 22 May-2 June 1995, V Round 30 November-22 December 1995, VI round 26 January-18 February 1996, VII round 26 January-21 July 1996 in Ashgabat, VIII Round with meeting with Rahmonov and Nuri in Bishkek, 16-18 May 1997.

Thus, even if their support was limited and Russia was the most powerful actor capable to stabilise the situation, the declarations and summits reviewed above well serve the scope of this chapter: the Central Asian states adopted rules, norms and institutions to manage and cope with their difficult post-independence environment, and acted in concert to solve those problems that could lead to regional conflagration and widespread conflict. The commonality of minds, the isonomy in their stance

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Kamoluddin Abdullaev.

towards the Tajik civil war especially with the help and support of Turkmenistan were another sign of their ability to act in concert, to frame together the situation and to adopt normative instruments to bring order to the region.

The military-security side of the Central Asian international society was also visible in the attempt to form a regional defensive force to prevent attacks from Afghan rebels, terrorists and to settle down the situation in Tajikistan.

The first ideas about integrating defensive systems and coordinating foreign policies in defence matters were already visible in the Bishkek meeting of 28 January 1994.¹⁰⁶ At this meeting, the three defence ministers of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan reached full mutual understanding on the joint use of the installations and facilities inherited by the sovereign armies from the USSR armed forces (Marat 2009).

In addition, the ministers also discussed mutual relations in the field of arms and equipment supplies, the training of officers and specialists, military transport and other issues. In line with the solidarist regional spirit analysed above, the good result of the meeting led president Nazarbayev to speak of a possible Central Asian peace force to guarantee stability and order in the region.

One year later, during a one-day summit of the Turkic countries held in Bishkek in August 1995, Nazarbayev stated that priority should be given to regional security, and gave his support to Karimov's proposal for a permanent conference on security in Central Asia under the UN.¹⁰⁷ While on the latter point nothing followed, with respect to the former he and the other Central Asia leaders favoured the creation of a UN battalion for resolving conflicts in the region. Thus, the Central Asian peacekeeping battalion (CentrAsBat) was formed on 15 December 1995 by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, under the aegis of the UN and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Partnership for Peace programme.¹⁰⁸

CentrAsBat was designed to act as a collective rapid-response unit and it was created to deal with exactly the kind of forces that were to surface in the region four years later - that is, as noted, radical extremists and terrorists. While peacekeeping was its primary goal, it could also have curtailed the activities of terrorists and other

¹⁰⁶ Russia's Radio, Moscow, 28 January 1994.

¹⁰⁷ Interfax Russian News, 28 August 1995.

¹⁰⁸ Turkmenistan signed the Partnership for Peace Framework Document on May 10 1994; Kazakhstan on 27 May; Kyrgyzstan on 1 June and Uzbekistan on 13 July.

extremist groups (Stein 2012: 3). Thus, it can be said that CentrAsBat was set up as a preventive measure.

CentrAsBat conducted military exercises in Central Asia with the U.S. in 1997 and 1998, and conducted a seminar in the U.S. in 1999. CentrAsBat '97 included a parachute drop by all three national members of the battalion and members of the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division. The units took off from Fort Bragg, North Carolina in eight C-17s and flew 16 hours to Kazakhstan. The exercise opened with a parachute jump into southern Kazakhstan followed by an exercise that included checkpoint control, vehicle inspections, riot control, mine field clearing and humanitarian aid operations. The latter half of the exercise took place in Uzbekistan.

Yet, absence of legal and military harmonisation, of interstate coordination and financial resources contributed to its failure. Thus, it was gradually transformed from a peacekeeping battalion into a group of national peacekeeping forces from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, as the countries of the region concentrated on developing their own law-enforcement and security-sector bodies (Esenov 2003). However, CentrAsBat's very existence paved the way for multilateral military exercises in 1998 and 2000 involving Central Asian, Western and some CIS countries. Cooperation between the armed forces of the then Collective Security Treaty (CST) member states (renamed in 2002 Collective Security Treaty Organisation, CSTO) has improved in part as a result of knowledge gained from these manoeuvres.

Thus, it can be said that this very experience, although short-lasting and victim of the sovereignty/autonomy mantra of the region, was effective in creating a sense of shared threats, of needs of common responses, of coordination and regulation of their own military activities and an awareness of Central Asia as a sort of RSC (Buzan and Waever 2003). The institution of CentrAsBat was dismantled, but it favoured an acquaintance with the norm of multilateral defence.

For example, after discussing the institutionalisation of CentrAsBat, all five Central Asian foreign ministers met in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe between 4-5 April 1997 (and previously in Kazakhstan on 28 February) to devise ways of neutralizing the threat they see posed by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and consolidating the peace process in Tajikistan.¹⁰⁹

Also, during a telephone conversation on 17 August 1998,

109 IPS-Inter Press Service, 7 April 1997.

Nazarbayev, Karimov, Akaev and Rahmonov were ‘unanimous in the opinion that the military conflict in Afghanistan must be discussed in detail from the point of view of stepping up security in Central Asia’, a news agency reported that day, quoting the Kazakh presidential press service.¹¹⁰

In another example of regional convergence of defence and security matters, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan held a meeting of their Foreign and Defence Ministers in March 1998 to discuss combating Islamic extremism and arms and drugs smuggling in the region. After the trilateral talks, Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov told the press conference that the three countries ‘cannot help being concerned over the instances of Islamic extremism throughout the region and in Uzbekistan in particular.’¹¹¹

The CentrAsBat spirit continued to inform the regional awareness of Central Asia, and increased notably the levels of solidarity among regional actors. As a matter of fact, the Defence and Foreign Ministers from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan met in Tashkent on 23 August 1998 to discuss ‘possible scenarios, measures, and assistance, including military assistance’ among the Central Asian states according to Tajik Ambassador to Uzbekistan Tadzhitdin Mardonov.¹¹²

Exactly one year later, following CentrAsBat exercises and joint meeting among Defence and Foreign ministries, the four governments implemented the potential solidarity in the military field launching a joint military action with a complete Central Asian character: Central Asian members operating on Central Asian soil.

As a matter of fact, on 8 August 1999 a group of twenty-one guerrillas seized a Kyrgyz mayor and three security officers, but the hostages were freed unharmed after several days. Then, some 10 days later, the new wave of rebels fanned out into at least two regions of southern Kyrgyzstan, seizing four villages. According to contemporary sources, more than 4,100 refugees had fled to the regional centre, Batken, to escape the fighting in the mountains. Earlier defence officials said there were 1,000 refugees.¹¹³ In addition, the rebels took four Japanese geologists, their Kyrgyz interpreter and a Kyrgyz general and soldier hostage.

110 Interfax Russian News, 17 August 1998.

111 Xinhua News Agency, 3 March 1998.

112 Associated Press Worldstream, 24 August 1998.

113 Agence France Presse – English, 28 August 1999.

Therefore, on 22 August 1999, the four Foreign Ministers – Kasymjomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan, Muratbek Imanaliyev of Kyrgyzstan, Talbak Nazarov of Tajikistan and Abdulaziz Kamilov of Uzbekistan – flew to Kyrgyzstan's largest southern city, Osh, on Saturday for a one-day meeting. In the press-statement after the meeting, it was said that the Foreign and Defence ministers and national security leaders of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan '[had] worked out a plan of joint action to liquidate the terrorist groups.' The statement said also that the bandits were emigrants from Central Asia and 'a whole series of other states' who 'pose a common threat to all states of the region.'¹¹⁴

The very reference to 'the region' paired with the agreement of setting up a joint rescue mission may well be a sign of a common we-feeling, of a common interest in managing regional affairs in a concerted way and to implement solidarist actions to reach a higher degree of stability, thus moving further away from a more pluralist conception of regional politics as mere coexistence. The joint military action was successful, and the hostages were finally rescued.

All in all, the military side of the Central Asian international society was another example of dead-letter solidarism (Murden 2009, see below), where the experience of CentrAsBat reflect a common feeling of 'being on the same boat' and common awareness of the need of concerted actions to achieve the goals of order and stability. However, sovereign considerations, such as the will of each republic to develop its own army according to its own necessities (Marat 2007), slowed and in the end stopped the process of military integration, thus closing the experience of an integrated Central Asian military body.

Nonetheless, that experience proved to be useful in creating a conscience of common dangers and on limited, short-termed possibilities of proactive cooperation, as the case of Japanese hostages showed. As the CAU in the economic field and the long series of diplomatic multilateral summits during the Tajik conflict, this limited solidarism created a template, a field for common discussion and socialisation that favoured a relatively smooth and ordered way of achieving an acceptable degree of order in the regional aspect of their international relations. The same happened in the environmental field.

¹¹⁴ Ibidem.

4.6 The Environment and the Nuclear-Weapon-Free zone as signs of a regional international society

This section aims at showing how environmentalism¹¹⁵ and resistance to nuclear weapons became two institutionalised practices in Central Asia, and how the process of institutionalisation was another example of the convergence of Central Asian governments and of the birth of a Central Asian order. For the purpose of illustrating the operation of a social mechanism among the states in the region, I will focus on the tragedy of the Aral Sea.

The exsiccation of the Aral Sea is largely due to the cotton monoculture, which in Soviet times was the main economic activity of the Uzbek SSR, the South-Western part of the Kazakh SSR and of the Northern part of the Turkmen SSR. Due to its natural characteristics, the plant of cotton requires a huge amount of water (and at a deep level, since the stem of cotton penetrates deep into the terrain). Since this cultivation was boosted, for greater economic profits, with pesticides and chemical products, this contributed to further salinization of the sea, which resulted in quick drying.

A few data indicate that the situation could not have been worse: while in 1960 its surface was 67,500 km², at the end of 2009 it was 8,409 km², with a loss of 88%. Its volume, from 1090 Km³, became 84.5, for a 92% loss. As far as salinity is concerned, while in 1960 it was 10 g/l circa, at the end of 2009 it resulted in more than 100g/l in the so called Large Aral (Zhurumbetova 2012).

Concerns over this disastrous situation were present in the region already in the early 1990.¹¹⁶ References to the need of joint actions and common plans for rescuing the Aral Sea were present also in the common positions of the Central Asian states before the set up of the CIS, and always constituted part of the five-way meetings between heads of states and state-representatives of the region.

As far as the institutional framework is concerned, the first step was the Statement signed by the Ministries of Water Resources of the former Central Asian Republics on 12 September 1991, in which they declared the need in joint

¹¹⁵ Environmentalism has been defined as the 'ideology that seeks to rebalance the relationship between human society and the natural environment and is driven by a concern for the survival of individual species and the health of ecological systems overall' (Falkner 2012: 511).

¹¹⁶ Shirin Akiner stresses that perhaps the core of the 'Central Asian identity' is exactly this environmental awareness that, to some extent, cuts the region off from other zones politically and socially (1998: 55).

management of water resources of the Aral Sea basin. An Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC) was established. The second step was on 26 March 1993, when the five Central Asian countries founded the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS).

Moving on to the policy side of the process of institutionalisation of environmentalism as a regional norm, we observe how, in the 1990s, several legal acts contributed to the entrenchment of a 'green culture' in the region, with respect to the Central Asian eco-system as well as of the narrower (and more serious) problem of the Aral Sea.

Already back in 1992, the Agreement on cooperation in joint management, use and protection of water resources of interstate sources was signed. All Central Asian states, including Turkmenistan, are parties of this agreement. One year later, in 1993, the Agreement on joint actions to address the problem of the Aral Sea and surroundings, environmental improvement and ensuring socio-economic development of Aral Sea region was adopted. Again, all Central Asian states are parties. In 1998, all Central Asian states (this time with the exception of Turkmenistan) adopted the Agreement on use of water and energy resources in the Syrdarya river basin, and in 1999 the important Agreement on the status of IFAS and its organizations, this time again with participation of all Central Asian states.

In addition, a series of 'soft law' instruments composed of declarations and statements of IFAS Heads of States, signalling the birth of an aspirational customary practice in the field of environmental stewardship, was adopted.¹¹⁷ They are the 1995 'Nukus Declaration of Central Asian States and International Organizations on Sustainable Development of the Aral Sea Basin', the 1999 'Ashgabat Declaration', plus the 2001 'Tashkent declaration', the 2002 'Dushanbe Declaration' and the 2009 'Joint Statement of the Heads of States-Founders of IFAS'. Environmentalism in Central Asia was entrenched by the interplay with norms discussed and formed the global level, thus following suit and taking advantage of the more general 'greening' of international society (Jackson 2000: 175-178; Falkner 2012: 511-514).

International legal instruments adopted and referred to by Central Asian states (but not necessarily by all of them, see next chapter) in their regional environmental management are the following:

¹¹⁷ On the notion of 'aspirationalism', meant in the ES literature as the tendency of states to tentatively abide by norms and rules over time, see Wilson (2009).

- The UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Water sources and International Lakes (Helsinki, 1992);
- The UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Water sources (New York, 1997);
- The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo, 1991);
- The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (Rio de Janeiro, 1992);
- The UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus, 1998)

The process of institutionalisation of the environmental norm within the Central Asian international society was visible in the more and more detailed organisation of the activities of the five republics in managing and discussing the problem of the Aral Sea. The setting up of IFAS, as a matter of fact, resulted in a much more coordinated and organised form of collaboration compared to the loose character of previous meeting and conferences.

IFAS is characterised by an Executive Committee, based in Almaty, Kazakhstan, which works as a developer of regular and close cooperation with the international community and regional states in order to achieve support in the implementation of action plans, undertaking work to draw attention to the problems of the Aral Sea basin: the conservation of water resources and ecosystems and socio-economic development.

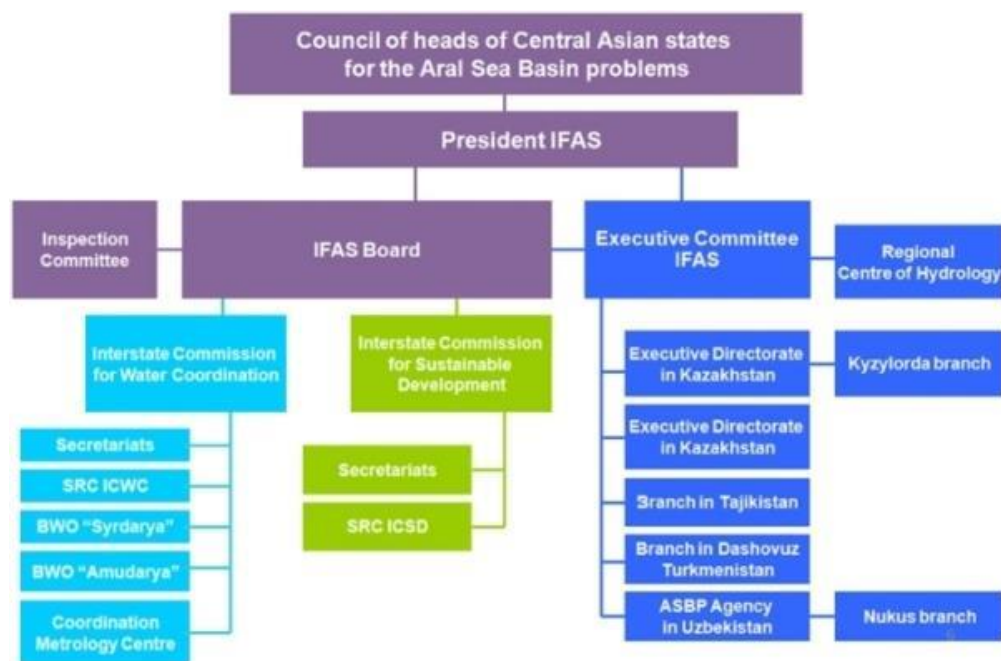
While results in environmental protection in Central Asia may have been modest,¹¹⁸ the institutionalisation of IFAS (which is a clear example of the generation of a ‘secondary institution’ following a ‘primary institution’, see chapter 3) and its continuous activity demonstrates that an environmental norm has penetrated Central Asia.

The very fact that Central Asian states still convene to discuss environmental problems using this institution is an example of how IFAS and its organizations have

¹¹⁸ Nonetheless, there have been good results recently in terms of environmental protection, especially thanks to some mediating and technical role played by the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), interview with a Central Asian representative of UNRCCA. See also ICWC (2012).

become an indispensable political platform for the negotiation process between countries, and for the development of bilateral and multilateral agreements for the joint integrated management of water resources of transboundary rivers in the basin of the Aral Sea.¹¹⁹

At the meeting of Presidents of Central Asia in Almaty on 28 February 1997, the decision for principal reorganization of the governance structure of IFAS was taken. This structure is still active at present:



Source: 'Legal Basis of IFAS', <http://ec-ifas.waterunites-ca.org/about/mfsa/110-legal-basis-of-ifas.html>, accessed on 20 June 2013.

The Central Asian specificity of the institution of environmentalism was visible already in the Tashkent Statement of 1991 when the presidents referred to the historical community of Central Asian peoples, their equal rights and responsibility for ensuring rational water resources use in the region, and recognised that only joint actions in coordination and management can help to effectively solve the region's water problems in a context of increasing ecological and social tension. The statement referred to 'indissoluble interdependence and relationship of all region peoples interests in common water resources use as a unified whole on the common principles and their consumption equitable regulation with regard to the all peoples interests'. Some years later, in 1999, President Niyazov argued that

¹¹⁹ Interview with Sultan Akimbekov.

Central Asian peoples have common historical, cultural and religious roots. [...] The Aral Sea problem was inherited from Soviet period. Now we bear full responsibility for the fate of our independent Central Asian states and for the coming generations which will live in the new millennium, and therefore we should take all necessary steps to restore the natural equilibrium of the Aral Sea basin as well as other areas of the region.¹²⁰

Yet, despite the intrinsic solidarist nature of the institution of environmentalism,¹²¹ its slow effectiveness has been permitted by strong pluralist attitudes within it, entrenched also in the instruments of international law. This shows how, from an ES perspective, the role and adoption of an institution must always be seen in relation with other institutions in a complex web of normative prescriptions *that may often clash with one another*.

As we have had the possibility to observe in the previous parts of this chapter, in the case of Central Asia in the 1990s, the paramount institution through which each international action was to be interpreted, was Westphalian sovereignty. The ICWC, included in the IFAS according to the Decision by the Heads of State of March 23, 1993, for example is a collective body of Central Asian States acting on the basis of equity, equality and consensus. If one member is against a certain policy to address a problem in the ecological sphere of water management of saving the Aral Sea, there is no implementation.

Article 1.3 of its statute reads that the ‘main goal of ICWC creation is approval of the principles of common water resources management and measures on joint programs realization on the base of mutual respect of the Sides interests [sic]’, and Article 3.3 foresees the presence of a ‘veto right’ in every decision of the commission.

In the Interstate Council for the Aral Sea (ICAS), designated in 1993 as the principal regional organization responsible for formulating policies and preparing and implementing programs for addressing the crisis and consisting of twenty high-level members, including ministers of water management from each state, each state had one vote and the decisions were adopted by consensus (Agreement, § 8).

Another example can be found in Article 3 of the Agreement between the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan on co-operation in interstate sources’

120 Turkmen Television, First channel, 9 April 1999.

121 Interview with Sultan Akimbekov; interview with Kazakh expert 1, November 13, 2013.

water resources use, protection and common management each party participating in the agreement is ‘obliged do not allow some action within its territory which can break interests of other parties and to make damage to them or lead to change of agreed water discharges and water sources pollution.’

Moreover, Article 13 of the of the same agreement reads that ‘all disputes have to be solved by the republican water-economic organizations heads,’ thus without foreseeing an institutionalised process of conflict-solve mechanism, and Article 14 of the IFAS agreement provides that ‘all disputes and disagreements between organizations of IFAS with the Sides, arisen during realization of the present Agreement, will be resolved by negotiations and consultations,’ thus *de facto* making the reach of common decision very difficult.

The greater good of environmental protection is allowed, present and institutionalised, but depends from the good will and commonality of interest of state leaders. That these aspirational commitments found low application in reality due to under-funding and lack of political will was evident also to Central Asian leaders themselves. Already in 1995, during the meeting of Central Asian states in the city of Dashkhovuz, following those in Kzyl-Orda and Nukus, Nazarbayev pointed at the several problems affecting the implementation of regional programs and initiatives to save the Aral Sea. He stated that

We simply cannot keep silent about the fact that we, the states who founded the fund, are not fulfilling our own obligations to transfer our contributions on time, which is delaying the attraction of other funds. It is clear that each of our countries can point to objective financial difficulties, but in this case I think it is much more important for us to increase the credibility of the fund and its intentions.¹²²

At the Ashgabat meeting in 1999, Niyazov recognised that the political aspects of the Aral Sea problem were ‘becoming a touchstone of our interstate relations and a touchstone for us as politicians and leaders’, which could be resolved only via ‘mutual consent and political will’. Yet, once again, he stressed the pluralist character of the region and the importance of respecting each other’s will in condition of equality: ‘without taking into account the interests of each state, it is hard to achieve any

122 Kazakh Television, Alma Ata, 5 March 1995.

success at all.’¹²³

After the set up of IFAS, results were visible in the approval of a World Bank (WB) project to manage the water resources and the environment in the Aral Sea basin, the cost of which is estimated at \$21 million. The states of the region agreed to contribute 20% of this total sum towards funding the programme. But overall, despite the great number of documents and declarations signed, the absence of conflict-resolution mechanisms and the over-reliance on consensus and on the ‘interest of the parties’ prevented the full realisation of what was an impressively institutionalised regional scheme of environmental management, especially if different economic conditions and technological imbalances are taken into account (Allison and Jonson 2001).

Yet, from an ES perspective, the effectiveness of all these initiatives is of less importance, and failures should not be interpreted too harshly. What counts here is that the durability, the continuous attendance of its meetings, and the structured organisation of this institution signals a common commitment of Central Asian states to solve what they perceive to be an environmental disaster that can well be a threat to their sovereignty and statehood in the near future.

The creation of specific regimes, the sustainability of meetings and consultations, the recognition of problems of economic and political nature and the constant reference to international (customary and written) legislation show how the norm of environmental protection has found resonance in the Central Asian region, especially thanks to those experiences of exploitation and environmental neglect in Soviet times which caused a sort of regional norm localisation, i.e., the adoption of a norm being entrenched at the global level but that was absent at the regional one. Indicative are the words of Karimov:

The entire socialist camp lived off that cotton. They put pressure on Turkmenistan, and not only it but also Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to produce more and more cotton – let’s have more cotton so that we can feed Cuba, Korea and the whole socialist camp with cotton. It was this barbaric use of water resources that led to the Aral tragedy. Our achievement in the post-Soviet period is that we, as you can see, five presidents are sitting around one table. Tell me, could we have arranged a meeting of the five republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, the five heads of these republics, in Soviet times? Never. No one would have let it happen. It is precisely the conditions of our independence, the conditions which have

123 Turkmen Television, First channel, 9 April 1999.

developed, which have allowed us to appeal to the world public, as Nazarbayev said.¹²⁴

While not entirely efficient on their own, all these regional initiatives signalled the adoption of a norm in a region cut off from the normative dynamics of environmental stewardship that were taking place at the global level at the moment of independence, and also have had the merit to attract the attention of international institutions, foreign sponsoring governments and sectors of world society (such as epistemic communities, TNAs, funding bodies and research communities) in order to find those solution and common grounds for discussion that a mere regional initiative would not be able to guarantee.

Also, from an international society perspective, this environmental concern has had the merit to make Central Asian states more acquainted with the instruments of international law and diplomacy, joining multilateral treaties, adopting international standards of reference and searching for multilateral formats of dialogue and discussion.

As a matter of fact, an analysis of the documents on environmental regional protection shows that there is still an adjustment to the provisions of international law, as there are many organisational, jurisdictional and legal overlaps among the institutions and their legal bases. In particular, it has been noted how the documents endorsed ‘acceptance of the existing situation with regard to the use of water, which calls for water apportionment and maximum utilization’ while ‘according to prevailing international practice, the concept of water apportionment is replaced with that of equitable and reasonable utilization. In addition, the emphasis currently is on the optimum, rather than maximum, utilization’ (Caponera in Vinogradov 1996: 411).

Thus, the creation of joint institutions favoured a slow but nonetheless observable move from a period of norm localisation (or rather norm ‘hybridisation’, as elements of international law and Soviet practices co-existed in the cooperative legal framework for the Aral Sea) to a more substantial norm adoption, which is the recognised international practice (in this case exemplified by the norm of optimum utilization of water resources) (Vinogradov 1996: 414).¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Kazakh Television, Alma-Ata, 5 March 1995.

¹²⁵ The emphasis on maximisation rather than optimisation and the solidarist intents ending up in pluralist, self-interested results have been also evident in the management of the Naryn/Syrdaya basin management. In March 1998, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan signed an agreement

Furthermore, the institutionalisation of ICWC made possible to preserve the unified water management system in the form of BVOs (Bassejnovoe Vodnoje Ob'edinenie), created in 1986, thus at least avoiding a deterioration in water routes and maintaining a commonly accepted framework to discuss re-distribution of water quotas (Vinogradov 1996: 407).

Moreover, the multilateral framework for environmental stewardship in Central Asia was paired with the mediating role of the CAU, the CAEC and in the 2000s of the CACO, thus reinforcing the sense of common interests and common incentives to provide the region with economic, ecological and social survival and development, downplaying competitive attitudes in the sharing of water resources in the region and promoting broader economic agreements including trade of hydroelectric energy and fossil fuel to promote regional goals (Wolf and Newton: 2008).

4.7 The Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone

Paired with the institution of environmentalism, context-specific derivative norms against nuclear weapons and nuclear experiments featured in the institutional framework of the Central Asian republics.

In Soviet times, Central Asia was a site for nuclear tests and nuclear storage. In particular several experiments, detonations and tests occurred in the at the 18,000-square-kilometer Semipalatinsk nuclear site in north-east Kazakhstan (also known as STS or Semipalatinsk-21). It has been calculated that from 1949 to 1989, at least 456 nuclear devices – both atmospheric and underground – were detonated there (Najibullah and Bestayeva 2011).

Nuclear weapons were also believed to be stationed and held in Uzbekistan, and it has been argued that the Soviet Union used two Peaceful Nuclear Explosions (PNEs) in what is now southern Uzbekistan to seal runaway gas well fires in 1966 and 1968 (Nordyke 1998). In addition, enriched uranium and other nuclear/radioactive

(joined by Tajikistan in 1999) on a barter system including water dispenses and other products in exchange of it from the downstream countries. While the compliance with the agreement has been extremely high, thus signifying the institutionalisation of environmental and water management in Central Asia, performance has been incredibly low. This is because commitments are very low, and the management of water was not optimal, reflecting a zero-sum logic on the side of upstream countries (Bernauer and Sigfried 2008: 488-494).

material had not been removed from Uzbekistan until 2006 (Linder 2006).

Given the centralised nature of the Soviet government, nuclear activities in the Central Asian region were not disputable. The dictates of Great-Powerness admitted no concerns for the health of the people and environmental consequences. However, consequences for health and biosphere have been tremendous: according to Togzhan Kassenova, radioactive fallout from nuclear testing had a direct impact on the health of about 200,000 local residents, with specific effects directly linked different forms of cancer and thyroid abnormalities (Kassenova 2009). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the site was closed and nuclear tests were halted.

The closure was favoured also by anti-nuclear movements which sprang spontaneously in Central Asia in the late 1980s. In particular, the Nevada Semipalatinsk movement in Kazakhstan, born on 28 February 1989 and led by the poet Olzhas Suleimenov, attracted thousands of people to its protests and campaigns which eventually led to the closure of Semipalatinsk.

Supporters of his movement were to be found in the whole Central Asian region and a branch in Bishkek, as well as in Europe and in the US. According to UNESCO 'the people of Kazakhstan undertook the first real step to universal nuclear disarmament by stopping tests in the USSR', and Nevada-Semipalatinsk

played a positive role in the understanding by the general public of the necessity to fight against nuclear threats. It gained wide support throughout whole world and, became a real historical factor in finding solutions to global ecological problems.¹²⁶

The actions of Nevada Semipalatinsk were of decisive importance for the cessation of atomic weapons testing in Kazakhstan as well as it was the gaining of sovereignty by the Republic. On 29 August 1991, Nazarbayev signed a Decree on the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear site. This was the first step to de-nuclearise the region. Soon, among Central Asian states a consensus was built to make Central Asia a nuclear weapon free zone (CANWFZ).¹²⁷ The initiative was launched by Uzbek President Islam Karimov in his speech at the 48th Session of the UN General Assembly on 28

¹²⁶ UNESCO Memory of the World Register, Ref. N°. 2004-22.

¹²⁷ The creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia is a diplomatic as well as a geopolitical success: as a matter of fact, the CANWFZ is the only NWFZ in the northern hemisphere. In addition, it is also the first of the NWFZ treaties to require its members to comply fully with the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

September 1993:

Uzbekistan is in favour of the total abolition of nuclear weapons. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will have to become a more efficient treaty, unrestricted by any time limits. Our Republic will actively participate in preliminary negotiations for the preparation of a conference on the prolongation of this Treaty. Uzbekistan is a staunch supporter of proclaiming Central Asia a nuclear-free zone.¹²⁸

The process of establishing the CANWFZ was long and not without clashes and disagreements (Kutnaeva 2013). What is of interest here, however, as stated many times, are the *modalities* and the *procedures* by which the five Central Asian states created some kind of order to manage what they believed to be a common and shared threat to their survival.

As it can be expected, the institutions of diplomacy and international law informed the adoption of shared understandings on nuclear issues in the region. In particular, the institution of regional summitry proved to be the preferred vehicle for advancing the creation, although negotiations within international institutions were part of the process as well. For example, in 1994, at the 49th session of the UNGA, Kyrgyzstan voiced support for the establishment of a CANWFZ, and in 1995 joined with Uzbekistan in proposing the creation of a CANWFZ at the NPT Review and Extension Conference.

As said, however, it was in the region that the road for the adoption of the treaty was paved. The crucial step in the process of moving the CANWFZ from an abstract proposal to a concrete policy initiative was taken on 27 February 1997, when the five presidents of the Central Asian states issued the Almaty Declaration endorsing the creation of a CANWFZ. The declaration specifically placed the establishment of the CANWFZ in the context of the environmental challenges faced by all five Central Asian states. Significantly, they agreed to call on all states concerned, on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the former Soviet Union nuclear weapons test site at Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan.

Two months later, on 7-18 April 1997, at the session of the NPT Preparatory Committee, the five Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) agreed to form a working group of foreign ministry officials to coordinate activities related to creating a CANWFZ. The group held

128 UN A/48/PV.6

meetings in Almaty, Bishkek, Geneva, New York, Sapporo, and Tashkent, thus integrating the process of the creation of the CANWFZ within international governmental and epistemic structures. These meetings resulted in preparation of a draft text of the Treaty for a NWFZ in Central Asia.

On 14-16 September, the international conference ‘Central Asia—A Nuclear Weapon Free Zone’ was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Among participants were three delegations from five nuclear states of the EEC, from African, Latin American and Asian countries, from the UN, OSCE, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Islamic Conference Organization, NATO, and others.¹²⁹

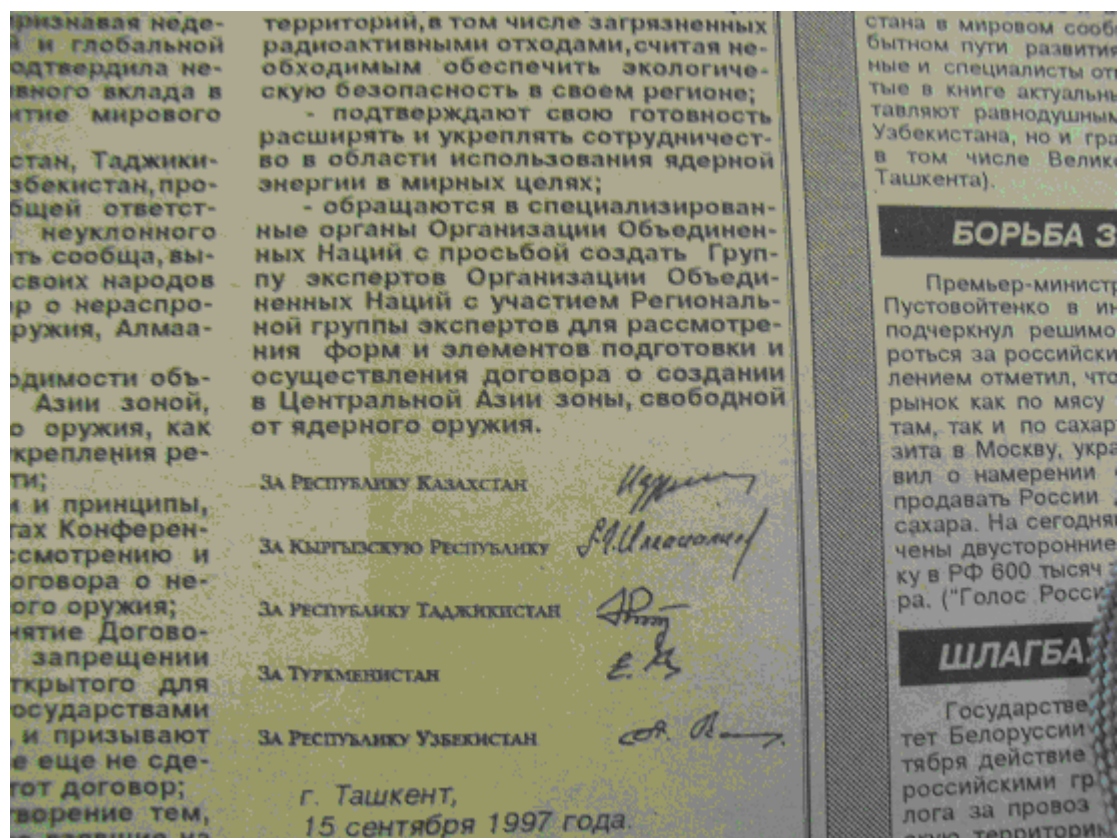
The conference considered lessons learned during the creation of these zones, which may be useful for the drafting of a CANWFZ treaty. Following the meeting, the Foreign Ministers of the five Central Asian States issued the Tashkent Statement, reaffirming their commitment to the establishment of a NWFZ and requested that the specialized agencies of the UN establish a group of experts, with the participation of experts from the region, to elaborate the forms and elements of preparation and implementation of an agreement on the establishment of a NWFZ in Central Asia.

This regional legal and diplomatic processes culminated in the 52nd session of the UNGA, held in September 1997, where the five Central Asian states jointly submitted a draft resolution endorsing the CANWFZ initiative.¹³⁰ The common interests and joint objectives of the Central Asian republics were, in the end, manifest on the global scene. In the document, the five states

aware of their common responsibility, proceeding from their unwavering desire to work together, expressing the united view of their peoples, and having signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons [...] consider[ed] that the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia is consistent with national, regional and global security interests.

129 Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 19 September 1997.

130 UN A/52/390.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 23-24 September 1997, signatures of the five Central Asian presidents on the document submitted to the UNGA endorsing the creation of a CANWFZ.

In 1998 (year of environmental protection in the Central Asian region, under the aegis of the UN, according to the Almaty declaration of 1997), on 9-10 July, an expert working group meeting, held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and attended by representatives from the five Central Asian States, the five nuclear-weapon states (NWS), the UN and IAEA, issued the 'Bishkek Communiqué'.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 8 July 1998.

The Communique recognized that the Central Asian States had made some progress in drafting the legal document on a NWFZ and that working consultations on basic elements of the future NWFZ were necessary. The five Central Asian States submitted a document entitled 'Basic elements of the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia'. The Central Asian States also acknowledged that continued consultations of experts from the NWS on the establishment of a NWFZ would be very useful (NTI undated).

As stated earlier, the process was not immune from disagreements and stumbling blocks. The two principal loci of disagreement that emerged during the negotiations among the five Central Asian states were (1) how the CANWFZ treaty would treat the possible transit of nuclear weapons through the CANWFZ; and (2) the relationship of the CANWFZ treaty to previous international agreements, especially security treaties involving some of the Central Asian states. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan argued for permissive provisions regarding transit and preserving existing security arrangements, while Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan favoured more restrictions on both transit and security arrangements (Kutnaeva 2013).

Nonetheless, the process of drafting the treaty continued, and disagreements were successfully dealt with in subsequent years. As the Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov said, the path towards a nuclear non-proliferation treaty in Central Asia would be a long one, but he argued that at least the Tashkent conference had paved the way.¹³¹

The discourse around the creation of a CANWFZ, however, highlights many interesting facts on Central Asia from an ES perspective. Firstly, it shows how in matters of survival, security and stability, the Central Asian states recognise their regionness in terms of common inheritances, security and environmental interdependence and prospects of development. As stated by the Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Muratbek Imanaliyev, Central Asian states reached, via constructive dialogue and common interests,

a significant contribution to nuclear disarmament, adding to regional and global stability, demonstrating the civilized countries' resolve to reassert the nuclear non-proliferation accord.¹³²

Secondly, it shows how the institution of diplomacy, its derivative of summitry and international law have been paramount in fostering regional dialogue, thus serving as a solid, reliable 'relational template' even if disagreements and confrontation (as the case of IFAS demonstrated) were common. In particular, these institutions proved to be a solid lane to the global level, thus linking the de-nuclearisation of the region to consultation and multilateral advice with global powers and institutions, as the 5+5+UN formula adopted in Bishkek and Tashkent (the five Central Asian states plus the five nuclear powers and the United Nations) shows.

Thirdly, it shows how the emergence of environmentalism as a primary institution (and of its derivative of anti-nuclear weapons) has been possible via the powerful role of historical processes and legacies, a common understanding among the leaderships of the region and, perhaps most importantly, by the role that TNAs

131 Agence France Presse – English, 16 September 1997. In an interview on 13 April 1999, the Kyrgyz Deputy Foreign Minister Dzhekshekulov argued that, in full compliance with international law, the zone would be totally conforming to the NPT, and that contra general scepticism and disagreements the Central Asian states had to be commended for finding 'platforms of dialogue', 'working mechanisms' to provide 'diplomatic convergence' to create the CANFWZ. The final project of the treaty was reached in the Tashkent summit between experts of the region on 1-3 February 1999. Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 13 April 1999, 'Tsentral'naya Aziya an uti k zone, svobodnoi ot yadernovo oruzhiya'.

132 Interfax Russian News, 20 July 1998.

and sectors of civil society have played in presenting environmental issues as regional ones (Weinthal and Watters 2010). In ES language, the inter-state society norm of environmentalism and its derivative of anti-nuclear weapons was enhanced and supported by relevant sectors of a Central Asian and global world society.

Thus, before concluding this section, it must be stressed that the Central Asian environmental realm is perhaps the most critical in terms of ES analysis, and the most interesting from a dynamic viewpoint. To adopt, interpret, localise, ameliorate and entrench in the region environmental and anti-nuclear weapons norms, a complex and polyhedral interplay of global, regional and local level has been at play.

Great Powers, international institutions global trans-national actors, regional institutions and consortia, as well as summits and meetings, sectors and movements of global and regional civil society: all these members of the international system have been protagonists in creating a normative framework for discussion, consultation and decision on delicate environmental issues which are truly and exclusively regional in character.

4.8 A regional international society at the level of Presidents?

In this last section, I argue that from an ES perspective, another distinguishing feature of the Central Asian international society that was forming in the 1990s was the legitimacy given to a specific form of government, that of patrimonial authoritarianism.

While homogeneity of rule is an indicator of a shared and agreed norm in a societal (and in this case regional) context (Cummings 2002: 1-10), we still need to look at the acceptability, at the legitimacy that such a norm has in the context. We need, in sum, to look at those evaluations, assessments, judgments and comments that make this norm 'the right thing to do' in the context under examination. If we looked just at homogeneity, the societal component of the task would be lost, and the whole exercise would be only pigeon-hole filling and shallow comparisons.

Again, words from local and international actors may be helpful in revealing the degree of acceptability of the institution of authoritarianism in Central Asia.¹³³ To

¹³³ I follow Linz (1970: 255) and consider an authoritarian regime a political regime 'with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive or intensive political mobilisation, excepts at some points in their

begin, after becoming independent, all five Central Asian states opted for presidential forms of government. And for the whole decade, the presidents had been all the same, and with the same Communist background: Niyazov had been in power since 1985, Karimov since 1989, Nazarbayev since 1989, Akaev since 1990 and Rahmonov since 1992 (when he became Head of Government; he then became president in 1994).

Combining increasingly different foreign policies and economic strategies of liberalisation, they achieved different degrees of concentration of power: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, for example, were more liberal and less authoritarian than Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Tajikistan, as we observed, was struggling with a bloody civil conflict and the government had very limited occasions to manifest its own nature.

All of them, however, presented distinct authoritarian traits: limited or almost non-existent opposition, very few civil and political rights, an emphasis on the provision of economic and social goods and preference for order and stability that for liberty and freedom. In this respect, Karimov was categorical: ‘in our republic there may be either democracy or order’. According to him, ‘the experience of South Korea, Chile, China and even Turkey’ were ‘the best proof of the effectiveness of a strong-arm policy in conditions of Central Asian countries’.¹³⁴

Due to the difficulties of political and economic transitions, however, and because of instabilities at the southern borders of the region, Central Asian presidents decided to give their presidential mandate a boost. In 1994, Saparmurat Niyazov extended his presidency via a referendum, which gave a positive response by 99.9 % of the votes.¹³⁵ In the neighbouring republics of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, in 1995, referendums were held as well to extend the length of the presidential mandate (26 March in Uzbekistan and 29 April in Kazakhstan). The few months between the referendums in the Central Asian republic is a hint of a mutual acceptability of this practice in a regional context where Soviet political and bureaucratic identities, patronage networks and security concerns requiring immediate and not contrasted actions were paramount (Collins 2002).

In the words of a Western diplomat based in Almaty then observing the

development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones’.

134 Moscow News (Russia), 10 September 1993.

135 Moscow News (Russia), 11 February 1994.

practice of referendum in Central Asia and confirming the presence of a commonality of minds of Central Asian leaders in structuring the region along precise political lines, '[a]ll these referendums in central Asia are definitely the result of a dialogue between the presidents'.¹³⁶ Indeed, Karimov was quick in congratulating Nazarbayev on his victory in the referendum:

The results of the referendum demonstrated once more not just trust in President Nazarbayev, not only trust in his policy and the policy of the government. [...] The most important thing is that the people of Kazakhstan have shown unity, because in these complicated circumstances only unity, stability and mutual understanding can make those great hopes and thoughts come true, those great wishes which Kazakh people want to make come true today.¹³⁷

Although Kyrgyzstan had been characterised a beacon of democracy in Central Asia, thanks also to the adoption of brands like 'the Island of Democracy' and 'the Switzerland of Central Asia' (Marat 2007), Akaev followed suit in what was becoming a legitimate regional practice. As a matter of fact, no criticism, no reprimands came to those leaders who enacted the referendums. On the contrary, a process of regional socialisation was underway.

Thinking of extending his power up to 2001, Akaev, after governing for one year by decree and shutting the Parliament, followed suit in the practice of referendum, but without success. In spring 1995, following talks started already in autumn 1994, a governmental group in Bishkek collected one million signatures, 52% of Kyrgyzstan's voting population in support of holding the referendum. The group said the country 'need[ed] unification around one leader, which might be inhibited by an election campaign', despite harsh criticism from a wide part of the population.¹³⁸

136 Agence France Presse – English, 29 April 1995.

137 Kazakh Radio first programme, Alma-Ata, 20 May 1995.

138 Associated Press Worldstream, 21 August 1995.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 24 October 1994.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 28 March 1995.

The decision to hold a referendum to ensure power and to prolong it was clearly dictated by the regional context: 1994-1995, as we saw above, were the years in which the construction of a Central Asian regional project was underway. Better

political relations with more powerful and authoritarian neighbours depended also, according to Akaev, on a common and shared political regime that would ensure stability and security to the region.¹³⁹ Indeed, the press-secretary of the president stated that the referendum was '*in keeping with the practice of neighbours*' (Huskey 1997: 275, fn. 91, emphasis added).¹⁴⁰ While the hold of the referendum was not successful because of the Parliament's rejection, Akaev held another referendum (this time successful) on extending his powers.

Acting directly on the Constitutional provisions, Rahmonov of Tajikistan expanded the post's duration from five to seven years. By the end of the decade, therefore, a true Central Asian 'club' of personal authoritarian regimes was established (Cummings 2002: 11), and the mutual legitimacy, mutual references of the presidents in the region made to each other weakens, somehow, Collins' argument of the 1990s as a phase of regime 'divergence' in Central Asia (2002: 140-141).

The words, the support, the justifications used by Central Asian presidents created a regional institution, that of personal authoritarianism, that was more and more increasingly shared by all members of the society. The institutionalisation of authoritarianism as 'the rule' in the region was also facilitated by other factors: all presidents had learned a common political language (Russian), received similar Soviet era ideological training, and were acquainted with one another as Communist Party officials. The legitimacy of the institution relied, therefore, on a strong Soviet inheritance which combines bureaucracy, tradition and personalised rule (Matveeva 2010: 18).¹⁴¹

Another example of authoritarian solidarity can be found after the Tashkent bombs on 16 February 1999, when several explosions took place in the Uzbek capital in what was an attack to Karimov allegedly on behalf of the Islamic Movement of

139 At the Shimkent meeting in April 1995, Karimov and Akaev expressed appreciation for Nazarbayev's idea of extending his powers via a referendum. Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 18 April 1995, 'U trekh – odna tsel'.

140 Mokhira Suyarkulova argued that Akaev's attempt to hold a referendum to extend his powers was 'a good example of a regional norm developing, of what is considered normal and desirable...yeah...and it happened a lot, this mutual socialisation'. Interview.

141 Several interviewees mentioned the familiarity, acquaintance, common mentality between the leaders as a stabilising factor in the region. E.g., interview with Kazakh Professor at KIMEP University; interview with Kazakh expert 1; interview with Irina Chernykh, expert in Kazakhstan, November 14, 2013; interview with Dosym Satpaev, Political Risk Assessment Group, November 18, 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan; interview with Kamoluddin Abdullaev; interview with Official Uzbek source.

Uzbekistan (IMU). On that very same day, President Karimov held telephone conversations with Nazarbayev, Niyazov and Akaev, with the latter expressing their condolences and deciding to become less rhetorical and more coordinated in their fight against oppositionist Islam and in tightening security measures in the region (Abdullaev 2002: 265).

The institution of patrimonial authoritarianism was supported also by regional leaders with cultural explanations, referring to a 'Eurasian culture' where deference, order and stability were key values. Perhaps unconsciously, the regional leaders engaged in a process of norm localisation (Acharya 2004), by stating that while it was true that they adopted the institutions of democracy as meant in the West, these institutions had to be 'tailored' and 'contextualised' according to the nature of the region.¹⁴²

This was evident in the words of Nazarbayev on the practice of the referendum: 'Western views of democracy have to be modified in the specific context of Asia'.¹⁴³ The rejection of the global character of the institution of democracy was evident in Nazarbayev's words, when questioned about the practice of referendums in the region: 'Why should people dictate to us how we should behave?'¹⁴⁴ In addition, speaking of his Central Asian fellows, he stated that

Kazakhstan is less than a century from feudalism, and only yesterday did we escape totalitarianism. How can we measure our democracy in the same way as the United States or Europe? Western models don't work in our Eurasian space. [...] We are Asian countries. We have a certain mentality of our own.¹⁴⁵

Significantly, at the gala ceremony for Nazarbayev's electoral victory in January 1999, both Karimov and Akaev were present.¹⁴⁶ The strength of the regional group around a personal, authoritarian leadership reached a peak comparable to an almost institutionalisation of dynasticism, when Nazarbayev's daughter Aliya and Akaev's

¹⁴² In order to anticipate possible criticism, it is worthwhile to recall that it is not of importance whether they were using these arguments just to support their power, rule and greed or whether they truly believed in a Eurasian culture. From an ES perspective, what is important is that references to a global-level institution, democracy, have been used to 'localise' and 'specify' a set of recurrently sustained shared practices that led to the adoption of a regional-level institution, patrimonial authoritarianism. On the practice of justifications, hypocrisy, window-dressing and smoke-screens in international society, see Jackson (2000: 67-68).

¹⁴³ IPS-Inter Press Service, 2 May 1995.

¹⁴⁴ The Associated Press, 5 April 1995.

¹⁴⁵ The Globe and Mail (Canada), 1 May 1995.

¹⁴⁶ Agence France Presse – English, 20 January 1999.

son Aidar married in Cholpon Ata in 1998.¹⁴⁷



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 21 July 1998.

Attending the wedding were also Karimov and Rahmonov, while Niyazov was recovering from an operation (BBC 1998). Perhaps more importantly, the wedding took place after a Central Asian summit one week earlier, so showing once again a degree of solidarity among the heads of states.

This discussion is inherently linked to what has been dealt with in Chapter 2 with respect to the relationship between neopatrimonial regimes and international society. It makes clear that it is conceptually difficult to follow a purely state-centric, conventional ES reading of international society when concepts like ‘security’ and ‘interest’ are in fact linked to regimes and not to states themselves and people.

In this last part of the chapter, I expand on the previous discussion focussing not just on how an international society is nonetheless conceivable between autocrats, but also how regime type functions as a constitutive element of such society,

¹⁴⁷ While not part of the questionnaire, this marriage has been interestingly mentioned several times as an example of regional solidarity in several interviews. E.g., interview with Emil Juraev; interview with Zhenis Kembayev, Professor of International Law, KIMEP University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, November 15, 2013; interview with Nuria Kutnaeva, independent expert and analyst, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, December 3, 2013.

demarcating an inside and an outside in which agents can find themselves.

With respect to the former, the research has shown how societal dynamics structured around discourses of non-interference, preservation of sovereignty, necessity of strong rule and preservation of authority can very much lead to a state (regime)-centric multilateralism focussed on minimal tasks of hard (regime) security and preservation (Jackson 2014). In the course of a discussion with a local international lawyer very much acquainted with Central Asian legislation on human rights and civil liberties, I was told that ‘in terms of internal legislation, they look at each other, they look at their behaviour, they mimic each other, they compare each other. They try to be at the same level. You can find the same law in all the countries with very little time difference. They also look at Russia, but their first referents are Central Asian states.’¹⁴⁸ This, as discussed in the course of the literature review and in the presentation of the theoretical foundations of the thesis, requires us to go beyond our Eurocentric normative assumptions of integration on multiple levels of policy based on liberal assumptions. In fact, as John Heathershaw argues,

Central Asian international politics are indeed fluid and regionalism is weak [...] but a Central Asian regional identity very much exists among political elites and is based on a neo-soviet ideology which is more or less practised and reproduced across the region. The identification of neo-sovietism as the basis for a Central Asian imagined regional community provides much-needed ideational context to the lack of institutionalised cooperation and functionalist regionalisation (Heathershaw 2006: 19).

This is true even with respect to more contemporary events. Recent revelations on Nazarbayev pushing for the restoration of an authoritarian form of government in Kyrgyzstan after the 2010 events (CA-News 2015) are an additional proof of the fact that ‘the rule in the region is internal stability and regional stability’. This neo-sovietism or, as it has been called here, elitist/autocratic solidarity, is institutionalised in the sense that it is visible in the discourses, in the practices, in the gestures of the regional leaders. A local representative of an international organisation told me, quite frankly, that ‘in terms of rules of the game, here it is personal relations that matter. All these presidents know each other from the past, they understand each other, they can even make favours to each other...After the elections, for example, it is really important who congratulates you first, and if you are late [by] a couple of days it can

148 Interview with international lawyer in Kazakhstan, 12 May 2014.

be taken as some kind of offence, it's a present, like at [a] wedding or at a funeral.'¹⁴⁹

This neopatrimonial understanding of international society is in fact very important for the regimes, as it not only gives them the possibility to reinforce their leadership in a relatively calm regional context, but also and perhaps more importantly provides them with *legitimacy* and *recognition*. As the political analyst Shairbek Juraev told me in the course of an interview, 'There is solidarity between authoritarian leaders in the region...but it is something you cannot really observe, because they don't get together...it is more in the practices...The way they treat opposition, how they treat Islamic radical movements, the way they modify the constitutions, the readiness to come together when it comes to extremism, separatism, terrorism and all those evils'.¹⁵⁰

Concepts such as *avtoritet* and *stabilnost* are performed and advocated within Central Asia: they are not just political narratives, but real normative discourses that inform social relations among regimes in the region. They have the status of *values* underpinning a community of states and leaders interested in preserving their power while maintaining peaceful coexistence and relatively low conflict to pursue exactly the task of regime enhancement. In this respect, my interview with the expert Irina Chernykh was insightful. She told me that 'during the 1990s and also now, the political elites of Central Asian countries securitise neighbours and some problems that happen inside [the countries] or between them to keep stability. ...During the civil war in Tajikistan, for us, internally, in the region and in the countries, it was "Tajikisation". And today it is "Afghanisation". It is very common practice that Central Asian political elites securitise security issues or some problems of neighbours. We are at the level of securitisation, but not of violating non-interference. This is because all Central Asian leaders are afraid of loss of stability. I remember Karimov and Nazarbayev speaking of "Tajikisation" in order to maintain domestic stability. "This is democratisation, do you want that?".¹⁵¹

With respect to the second point, it is indeed very interesting to discuss how authoritarianism became, and still is, the 'membership criteria' for the Central Asian regional international society, a real 'constitutive' norm. As we saw, Akaev felt

149 Interview with a Central Asian representative of the UNRCCA, Central Asian capital, 29 November 2013.

150 Interview with Shairbek Juraev, independent analyst, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 28 November 2013.

151 Interview with Irina Chernykh, expert in Kazakhstan, 14 November 2013.

pressured by the referendums in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and felt the need to keep up with the neighbours' practice in order to be accepted and considered. This is also visible later on after the 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan. The demise of the authoritarian and neopatrimonial regime of Bakiyev, despite claims to non-interference and legitimacy accorded to the new government, was felt as a *deviation* from the rule. Kyrgyzstan was mentioned as a 'bad example' in the region by several interviewees. Some of them actually referred to international society logics in play. The political scientist Mars Sariev, for example, argued that '[One] can explain parliamentarianism in Kyrgyzstan with the absence of resources. We needed investments, we met the conditions of the West. We actually got billions of dollars. But it is still an experiment, a project. But we need funds, there is conditionality. But the main actors in the region, especially Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, don't like this, and they look at Kyrgyzstan as a sort of white bird (*belaya vorona!*). It's a white crow!'¹⁵² Nuriia Kutnaeva described Kyrgyzstan as 'the child whom nobody wants to play with', and stated that 'this difference in regime type is also affecting international relations in the region, since for authoritarian states [it] is difficult to deal with Kyrgyzstan'.¹⁵³

In addition to this narrative, two official Uzbek sources referred to authoritarianism as 'the rule', and blessed Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan ('we were lucky to have such leaders!') for having strong personalities to resolve conflicts: 'Strong leaders preserve order. Compare Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to Kyrgyzstan!'¹⁵⁴ The performative construction of Kyrgyzstan as an 'outsider' of the Central Asian society of states, as the 'pariah', was even more evident in the 'brotherly' Kazakhstan. As a local expert, who worked on regional politics in 2010, told me,

the neutrality of Kazakhstan was like this chaotic Kyrgyzstan is a threat", this image was very much there, and we did not like it because...it's ok if it reflects the reality, but actually they were showing [the] population of Kazakhstan, "you don't want this in Kazakhstan". It was in the interest of the authorities to show the very, very negative images of Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan said we were a threat so this is why they closed the borders. This was not the

152 Interview with Mars Sariev, Analyst and Leader of Experts Club, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 3 December 2013.

153 Interview with Nuriia Kutnaeva, independent expert and analyst, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 3 December 2013.

154 Interview with two representatives of the Institute for Strategic and Regional studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Tashkent, location undisclosed, 13 December 2013.

reality, but this situation affected us, no interactions, no flows, this was forcing our economy to go down [...] people lost lots of money. With respect to Kazakhstan, because of our unity, the nomads, you know, we were expecting support. *We expecting support, but we got the blame.*¹⁵⁵

In conclusion, by looking at regional expressions of mutual support among the leaders, the cultural contextualisation of indigenous political practices against global ones, keeping in mind that in order to be deemed such, an institution has to be seen as 'legitimate' by the society of reference (Clark 2005, see also Zhardykhyan 2002: 168), and therefore to involve 'the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society' (Lipset 1960: 60), the claim that patrimonial authoritarianism was and still is a defining institution of the Central Asian international society can be advanced.

4.9 Conclusions

Research for this chapter has suggested that in the 1990s Central Asia, far from being a locus of stagnancy, plain rivalry and disorder, was a place of active inter-state relations conducted in a fairly ordered way. Capillary webs of potential solidarity were already constructed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Once independent, these states incorporated straightforwardly those institutions that make possible for a state to be part of international society, namely sovereignty, international law and diplomacy.

However, regional peculiarities affected the interpretation of numerous institutions of the global level, thus making possible, at least for this period of time, to speak of a Central Asian international society made up by the former Soviet Islamic republics. Because of their nature as poorly domestically legitimised, personalistic and patrimonial regimes, the institution of sovereignty has been interpreted in the strictest way possible. A Westphalian interpretation of sovereignty, strongly linked with a pluralist conception of international society was the one adopted in Central

155 Interview with Expert in Kyrgyzstan, 27 November 2013. These narratives were told me also by Kazakh analysts and experts. For example, Zhenis Kembayev argued that 'the events in Kyrgyzstan were broadcast through all the region, everyone could see and know what exactly was going on there, and the commentaries said this is what happens within countries with no stability, where there is no strong rule.' Interview with Zhenis Kembayev, Professor of International Law, KIMEP University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 15 November 2013.

Asia in the 1990s. Regional states have adopted mainly a *de jure* interpretation of sovereignty, and even with weak legitimacy have enthusiastically reaffirmed the might of the sovereign state over any other alternatives (be they regional groups, as in the case of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, minority groups, as it was the case of Kazakhstan or transnational pan-Turkist movements, as it was the case in Uzbekistan).

This created a rift even with Russia, which due to pristine memories of *grandeur*, exigencies of control at its borders or both, tended to favour a more ‘some-sovereigns-are-more-equal-than-others’ view (Deyermond 2008). There was a tendency to see Russia as adopting a relaxed interpretation of sovereignty, not equality, while Central Asia was quite ‘hard rock’ and more in favour of equality (Ayoob 1995). It was an attempt to resist a larger, CIS-based hierarchical international society. Quite tellingly, Central Asian states joined each other in protesting on the occasion of the symbolic vote of the Russian Duma annulling the dissolution of the USSR in 1996.

As it is to be expected in ES theory, this interpretation of sovereignty affected also the viability of secondary institutions and integration projects. While the states recognised that cooperation and integration was in their common interest due to Soviet legacies in matters of economic interdependencies, infrastructures, water courses and transnational threats, the Central Asian states seldom agreed to cede voluntarily parts of their sovereignty, as they were engaged in processes of state- and nation-building.

The adoption of international law was straightforward and did not represent major rifts from the global level. Perhaps, as has been noted, a peculiarity of the Central Asian context was the contemporary presence of international and Soviet practices in dealing with international regulations, as it was in the case of water management and optimum utilisation of water quotas.

Also, the analysis above suggests that while the ‘hardware’ component of international law, namely respect of sovereignty, borders and non-interference was well entrenched in the region, more regulative and multilateral international norms were often violated when in contrast with national interests, therefore suggesting a *shallow*, or *progressive* adaptation to the institution.

Diplomacy was an underpinning institution of the region, and did not present any significant interpretation different from the global level. Embassies, borders and

bilateral/multilateral cooperation were all managed via diplomatic means, and president-to-president contacts helped maintain the region stable.

However, I make the case for introducing a new derivative of it: the derivative of summitry, meant as recurrent, although not routinised, summits held outside a formal institutional framework. As a matter of fact, a plethora of meetings were held by Central Asian state leaders, and often outside the context of secondary institutions. Whether to face Islamic militantism from Afghanistan, spillovers from Tajikistan, preventing nuclear disasters, debating the ecological status of the region, or simply drafting the main priorities for developing the region, Central Asian leaders convened summits. In the words of Dzhekshekulov, Deputy Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan, nine meetings between the presidents took place between mid-1994 and January 1997 alone, suggesting that multilateralism was an institutionalised format in the 1990s. Plus, in his words, there were tens of meetings of other representatives.¹⁵⁶

I consider summitry as a derivative of diplomacy in the light of the fact that summits perform also functions that may be not related to diplomacy. For example, they may be used to gain legitimacy; to gain visibility on the world stage; to lay the ground for proper diplomatic negotiations; to give domestic actors prestige and legitimacy.¹⁵⁷

Furthermore, if one pays attention to the geography of summitry, one will notice that Ashgabat figured prominently in the list of meeting venues, thus weakening the argument that due to positive neutrality Turkmenistan stayed outside the management of the region.

Moreover, interactions with the UN and Great Powers, especially on the Tajik, Aral and nuclear questions, showed how diplomacy was used ‘on a double-track strategy that combined internal regional interstate channels with external interactions between the states of the region and foreign powers’ (Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009: 97).

This chapter has also made a case for considering authoritarian neo-patrimonialism a regional institution, distinctive of the Central Asian context in its maintenance of Soviet cadres and in its strong, vertical character. While at the global level this institution contrasts with those of democracy, equality of people and human

¹⁵⁶ Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 30 January 1997, ‘Tsentral’naya Aziya: potentsial integratsii’.

¹⁵⁷ In seeing ‘summitry’ as an autonomous institution of international society, I concur with Peter Wilson (2012: 576).

rights, at the macro-regional level it also differentiated the region from its former patron, Russia, reforming itself after the Soviet experience. The practice of referendum, family links and mutual support among autocrats did not find parallel episodes in Moscow.

Given the post-colonial nature of Central Asia, it is not surprising that one of the most prominent institutions in the region was that of GPM. The adoption of this institution has been visible both in the 'outside-supply push' and 'local-demand pull' dynamics. Russia was simply too important, economically and militarily, to be left out of the regional equation.

Kyrgyzstan held Russian troops stationed along its border with China up to 1998, Tajikistan hosted the motorised division on its soil during the civil war, as well as Russian border troops on its southern border, Kazakhstan hosted on its territory the 40th division of the Russian army, Uzbekistan concerted its actions in Tajikistan with it and Turkmenistan negotiated a military agreement in 1992 on joint control of borders and air defence provided by Moscow.

Regional demands for intervention and help, however, demonstrated the strong local acquiescence with the working of the global institution (Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009: 101). In addition, all states except Turkmenistan signed the Collective Security Treaty in 1992, while Kazakhstan expressed the idea of a Eurasian Union already in 1994, and Kyrgyzstan joined a Russian-led Custom Union in 1996. Furthermore, it should be remembered that Russia was observer also at the CAU (from 1996) and IFAS, thus closely monitoring the activities that Central Asian states were carrying out. Following what has been said in Chapter 3 on the nature of hegemony as an institution of the regional international society, it can be therefore said that especially in the field of security (the one most closely linked to the survival of states and, therefore, of ruling elites) Russia was accorded legitimacy as hegemon, to the point that Russia perceived these states as 'not quite foreign' (Page 1994: 789).

The institution of environmentalism was accepted by all states in the region, and became soon a regional feature. As a matter of fact, even if Russia was observer at the IFAS, it was often considered the responsible for the present ecological status of the region. Water was so important, both in terms of assuring the viability of state projects and in strengthening interdependencies among the units that the Aral Sea and water management could even be considered as institutions on their own.

GPM, international law, summitry and diplomacy all played relevant roles in

sustaining the cooperative attitude toward the management of the shrinking of the Aral sea, and limited policy outcomes can be also seen as the impact of the institution of sovereignty on it.

A derivative of the institution of environmentalism, characteristic of the region, is the collective ban of anti-nuclear weapons, exemplified by the diplomatic and legal work behind the creation of a CANWFZ. This initiative came directly from the five republics, and was successfully brought forward (not without hindrances) with the help of the GP and international institutions.

The research on that derivative institution contributes to the wider body of ES literature dealing with regional international societies identified in the literature review. As a matter of fact, Buzan and Zhang stress that a NWFZ is a distinctive regional institution of the Latin American international society (2014b: 220). Yet, here it has been traced the birth, the development and the institutionalisation of the CANFWZ, thus showing that also Central Asia features such institution. In this respect, therefore, the particularity of Latin America does not hold.

What, is striking by its absence, is war as an institution. Despite several skirmishes at borders, the threats of minorities, presence of enclaves and personal animosities, inter-state relations in Central Asia over the 1990s never broke down to the level of organised inter-state violence (Abazov 1999b; see also Hinnebusch and Cummings 2011: 343). The institutions of diplomacy, sovereignty and ‘iron-territoriality’ paired to the common intent of the leaders to prevent war and conflict helped avoid ‘Balkanisation’. There was no Central Asian Bosnia, nor Kosovo. While the role of Russia was crucial in ensuring stability in the hottest years of the Tajik civil war, we have highlighted how regional leaders themselves refrained from actions that could have sparked conflict in the region.¹⁵⁸

Given this institutional map, what was the character of the Central Asian international society in the 1990s? It was certainly an open society (Luard 1970). The degree of permeability to external intervention was both a product of its weak foundational status as new states and of their necessity to diversify markets, investments and foreign actions, factors which affected also the shallow adoption of the institutions of (multilateral) international law and environmentalism.

158 See e.g. Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 7 August 1998, ‘Tsentral’naya Aziya: edinaya i nedelimaya?’, where the experience of the CAU was considered as a factor preventing ‘Yugoslavisation’.

It was also a 'concentric' society, with a pluralist core made up of all five states in the region (as a matter of fact all five states shared the institutions described above) with a solidarist circle (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, later joined by Tajikistan), more prone to economic and political integration projects (explicitly rejected by Turkmenistan). The nature of this solidarist circle, however, clashed with national and self-interested policies that prevented any delegation of substantive sovereignty to supranational bodies.

The best way to describe an international society that feels the need to integrate but it is subject to national and egoistic pulls, has been that of 'dead-letter international society' coined by Simon Murden (2009: 117-118). According to him, in a dead-letter international society '[s]econdary institutions reflect common aspirations, but do not lead to substantive integration. Concerns about relative gains among brethren states are only partially offset by common values' (2009: 118).

The dead-letter nature of the Central Asian solidarist circle may be explained also by focussing on the underlying relation(s) between primary and secondary institutions. As new states, the maintenance of sovereignty, of territorial integrity, the fear of transnational threats and the different ways of developing the economy halted substantive advancement of the CAU and the CAEC, and did not improve the situation of the Aral Sea via the IFAS. The pre-eminence of the basic primary institutions, aimed at warranting coexistence and survival of the units contrasted with the higher aims of the regional projects.

Central Asian leaders were aware of this impasse, but they maintained a strong interpretation of those institutions that, in a way, have to be relaxed if a regional project of economic integration is to be workable (such as sovereignty and borders). Thus, Central Asian international society observed two distinctive phases: from an initial solidarity, when projects of integration were eagerly put forward, to a dead-letter one, when the aims of integration were downplayed because of the prevalence of territorial and foundational institutions.

While the literature has explained the failure of integration projects in terms of regimes' rent-seeking and personal enrichment (Allison 2004; Allison 2008; Collins 2009; Cooley 2012), the suggestion here is that the crucial purpose of the 'society' was simply different, being the minimal one of survival (both of the state and of the regime).

Effectively open borders and transnational flows of people and goods, while possibly enhancing the economic outlook of the region, were avoided because, in the minds of the leaders, they could have disrupted the precarious equilibrium that was achieved in the very early 1990s with pledges to territorial integrity, non-interference and *uti possidetis*. For example, comparing Central Asia to the Middle East, Raymond Hinnebusch and Sally Cummings argue that

despite some border disputes, borders have acquired a fair amount of legitimacy in Central Asia. No minority has to date asked for a separate state and no ethnic group has adopted violent irredentist practices, although borders have had devastating effects on the livelihoods of cross-borders communities and also on the cultural cohesion and strength of ethnic groups that are spread across borders' (2011: 343).

The solidarist features of the Central Asian interstate society were derived from *external* events and external shocks (mainly, the collapse of the Soviet Union), fostering an 'externally pushed' international society. It was 'reactive solidarism'. However, the pluralist attitudes inside the region contrasted these solidarist ones creating a mixed, promising but inefficient regional scheme of coordination. Paraphrasing a famous article on the difficulty of rejoining pluralism and solidarism in the ES, one may say that Central Asian leaders were 'solidarist of the mind, pluralist of the will' (Wheeler and Dunne 1996). The maximum that could be achieved was not proactive solidarity, but only defensive regime solidarity.

Far from being virtual, it had nonetheless the merit to protect the region, the regimes (whether we like it or not) and to create a thin sense of political community. We should also remember that

in the 1990s [...] the CIS states had to reconcile the consolidation of national sovereignty with the demands of regional integration. In the first round, national sovereignty won. That is why the 1990s were mainly years of disintegration with attempts to institutionalize the processes of multilateral cooperation and subsequent failures to implement the signed agreements (Nikitina 2013: 2).

This chapter has therefore made a case for considering Central Asia in the 1990s as a regional international society, and has done so by making three steps: observation of the events and practices of the states, analysis of such practices and of narratives surrounding these practices, conclusions inferred from the observations conducted and

the analyses made (Luard 1970).

By adopting simultaneously the categories of pluralism and solidarism, I tried to show how Central Asia in the 1990s embarked on the difficult task of managing the delicate phase of transition from federal republics to independent, sovereign states, and of creating and sustaining via appropriate norms and institutions its new regional environment.

Also, I tried to show how these norms and rules operated. Since it is important also to verify in the words of the leaders a concern towards the society as a whole, and therefore a communitarian concern, whenever possible I stressed also narratives and examples not just of regional solidarity, but also of regional awareness in an emic perspective, thus adhering to the script I set out in Chapter 3.

Clearly, the picture provided is far from being clean, neat and rosy. Cooperation and competition, amity and enmity, agreement and disagreement were constantly at play simultaneously, but ironically this multi-facetedness of social relations proves the liveliness, the sizzle of the society, not its absence.

In Central Asia there was perhaps less than the liberal would hope for, but certainly more than the realist supposes to find. Far from being ineffective, the regional projects of the Central Asian republics perhaps did not lead to full-fledged integration (meant as a purpose-oriented sharing of sovereignty) but at least let them familiarise with their environment, with the instruments of international relations, allowed them to keep the tone cool, and maintain a sort of defensive solidarism when it came to regime preservation.

The kind of analysis conducted here, I argue, has two merits that are seldom found in the literature on Central Asia, thus contributing to it:

1. it corresponds more closely to the reality of international relations.
From the very moment that there is regular communication between states, as opposed to occasional chance contacts, an embryonic type of society begins to develop;
2. it is more comprehensive, it focuses on a variety of international phenomena that range from economics to territorial management, from law to war, from diplomacy to environmentalism. This is because the sociological approach of the ES necessarily takes account of all the phenomena that are ‘social’.

The best place where to see the solidity of an international society is in moments of change, and Central Asian states underwent quite a substantive one in 1991. If we accept that the stress should be on the ability to engage with change, then we can say that for all its shortcomings and weaknesses, the Central Asian regional international society well adapted to the new international context, and allowed the units to survive the phase of transition.

Chapter 5

Central Asia in the 2000s:

Is the absence of regionalism the same as the absence of a society of states?

5.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the second decade of independence, until 2014 and the very recent developments in the region. In particular, it seeks answers to a number of questions: *has an international society developed in Central Asia since the year 2000? If yes, following what path? What are the main differences with the 1990s international society? If not, due to what constraints? How have institutions and norms been understood in the region in these last some 10 years? Is there anything specific, from an international perspective that may allow us to speak of a 'Central Asian order'? If yes, what are the prospects for the evolution of this order?*

Before presenting the structure of the chapter, I will briefly convey the whole argument underpinning it. In this chapter, I make a strong case for considering the ES not just as a useful theory to study, scrutinise and understand international relations in Central Asia, but as *the most useful one*. As a matter of fact, it will be argued that even if the region has strong realist connotations from an IR Theory perspective, the role that institutions and norms have played so far in keeping the system stable and viable for the units cannot and should not be downplayed.

The problem, as already noted, is what purpose we assign to this society. A society can perfectly exist without developing sophisticated, solid and durable forms of agreements and cooperation on a gamut of issues. A society can perfectly exist even with the sole scope of guaranteeing stability for its members. It is evident that the latter form of society is less developed than the former one. Nonetheless, even to create such a thin, feeble societal arrangement, it is clear that several norms and institutions have to be adopted in order to perform and carry out the tasks linked to the idea of stability, survival and common life.

The chapter is structured as follows: in the next section, I offer a brief account of the international developments that took place at the systemic level in the early 2000s, in particular the post-9/11 developments and the strategic reassertion of Russia and China over the region. This will set the scene wherein the context for Central

Asian international politics will be put under scrutiny. In the following section, I focus on the experience of the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO), the last Central Asian regional organisation, focusing on the norms and values embodied in it, as well as the function that it played in the regional system.

Then, I make a case for considering the end of regionalism in Central Asia as something different from the end of societal dynamics. I will focus, in particular, on two domains where an international society logic is indeed visible even in the absence of formalised, institutionalised regionalism: the Osh events in 2010 and the thorny path to water-management problem-solving.

I will substantiate my analysis with the words and opinions of my interviewees reflecting on societal dynamics among the Central Asian states. In particular, I will make use of their insights and narratives to argue that several informal institutions are indeed in play in the region, and that it is not only thanks to this that we can speak of a regional order in Central Asia, but that it is because of them that major confrontations and conflicts have been so far avoided.

In the conclusion, I will sum up the whole argument, will answer once for all whether there is an international society in Central Asia and will comment on its characteristics.

5.2 The New International Context

The relatively calm international context in which, for a decade, the Central Asian republics navigated their way through their first experience as independent sovereign states received a blow with the terrorist attacks to the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001. Up to that moment, Central Asia was in connection with Great Powers, but the Tajik civil war aside, the economic, not the (geo)political aspects of these connections were the main factor. With the US intervention in Afghanistan and the subsequent penetration of Great-Power politics in the region, the whole reconfiguration of systemic forces in Central Asia drew up a new set of relations (Rumer 2002).

In particular, the presence of US troops in Afghanistan meant three different things for the international relations in Central Asia:

1. the provision, from Central Asian states, of facilities to wage war in the neighbouring territory of Afghanistan, be they military bases (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan), transit routes (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan)¹⁵⁹ or free-flight zones (Turkmenistan);¹⁶⁰
2. the strategic reassertion of Russia and China in the region to contain the American presence, to secure economic investments and, in the case of Russia, to maintain a close eye on what has been considered a privileged 'sphere of influence';
3. the radicalisation of unconventional, trans-national threats spurring from Afghanistan, northern Pakistan and other non-controlled areas in the territories of Central Asian states.

With respect to the first point, the agreements signed with the US on the one hand (Kyrgyzstan on the airbase in Manas and Uzbekistan on the airbase in the Uzbek towns of Karshi and Khanabad, 90 miles from the Afghan border) and with Russia on the other hand (Kyrgyzstan on the airbase in Kant) embroiled the Central Asian states in a series of negotiations, diplomatic consultations and also mutual suspicions (the Uzbek government was against the installation of another Russian airbase in southern Kyrgyzstan) that effectively, for good or bad, linked the region to the global context tightly. This also has led, undeniably, to significant resource- and aid-reception from the poorer Central Asian republics (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) in terms of foreign assistance packages, updates of their military equipment and security machinery (Olcott 2005: 331).

Even more importantly for the argument of this chapter and, more in general, of this thesis, is that the simultaneous presence in the region of three different Great Powers with not only different agendas but also different normative orientations has created a sort of competing socialisation process, in which the Central Asian states

¹⁵⁹ Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Kazakhstan sent a small group of twenty-seven troops to Iraq in support of the US-led coalition after initially opposing the war within international organisations and forums (Olcott 2005: 332).

¹⁶⁰ On 14 September 2001 Turkmenistan agreed to send humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, to open transit routes through its territory and to grant US Air-Force open-sky policy; on 8 October an agreement was reached with Tajikistan to station troops there; on 12 October the US Government reached an agreement with Uzbekistan to station troops on its territory; on 28 December the Kyrgyz Parliament approved the installation of US military facilities at Manas Airport (see Jonson 2004: 88).

have still to choose which path to follow (Lewis 2012a).

With respect to the second point, it must be noted that, after initial indifference, Russian foreign policy towards the region was re-directed towards the ‘south-eastern vector’ when Evgeny Primakov became Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1996. Nonetheless, due to the changing international environment described above, Russia focused even more on Central Asia after 2001,¹⁶¹ with a reinvigorated and boosted emphasis on the notion of Eurasianism (Rumer 2002: 59; Jonson 2004; Kuhrt 2007; Lo 2008).

In particular, from a mere military viewpoint, already in the first half of the 2000s Russia reached important agreements with the Central Asian republics to reassert its presence in the region, such as the already noted basing rights for the Russian military in Kant, a long-term lease for a base in southern Tajikistan (October 2004), and increased coordination of Russia’s air defence with that of Uzbekistan (Olcott 2005: 333). These activities were carried out either as an actor on its own or within the framework of the CSTO, formed in 2002 (Buszynski 2005: 553).

Furthermore, Moscow expanded its security cooperation with Uzbekistan in other ways. In June 2004, the two governments signed a Treaty on Strategic Cooperation stating that the ‘sides, based on the separate agreements, will offer to each other the right to use the military facilities that are located on their territories’. In addition, the agreement also foresees additional Russian military assistance to Uzbekistan and the creation of a joint antiterrorism institute (Weitz 2006: 158).

Also from an economic perspective, Russian–Central Asian trade recovered consistently at the beginning of the 2000s and tripled between 2003 and 2007, skyrocketing from US\$7 billion to US\$21 billion, a third of which coming from the hydrocarbon sector (Laruelle 2008: 5).

China intensified its presence in the region as well. In the 1990s, China’s role was primarily diplomatic. It recognised Central Asian states’ independence immediately in December 1991, and was quick to establish diplomatic relations with all of them already in 1992 (Swanström 2005). Furthermore, diplomatic measures were pursued in stabilising borders and enhancing their inviolability. Proof of this was a treaty signed in 1996 between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and

¹⁶¹ Indeed, Vladimir Putin affirmed that Central Asia ‘constitutes a major foreign policy priority and a zone of Russian national interests,’ reflecting the Russian belief that ‘while the Americans are here now, we are in the region for ever’ (quoted in Frickenstein 2010).

Tajikistan establishing mutual military confidence-building measures, and situating in an international law framework the inviolability of the internationally recognised frontiers (Sheives 2006).

From the early 2000s onward, however, China started to carry more weight in the region, both from an economic and a security viewpoint. As a matter of fact, it should be considered that 'between 1994 and 2006 the bilateral trade between China and Central Asia grew 30 times to reach 10.8 billion US dollars'. In particular, such a rise 'has been particularly acute since year 2000, when Beijing launched its "Go West" policy' (Kaukenov 2009: 40). Investments in the oil and gas sectors, particularly with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and economic activities in the hydroelectric sphere in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, delineate the contours of Beijing's development strategy in Central Asia.

The more assertive Chinese presence in the region, as said, is also observable from a diplomatic and security viewpoint. Already in July 2000, on China's proposal, the Dushanbe Declaration was signed. The 'Shanghai Five' members pledged mutual help and solidarity against the three evils of terrorism, extremism, and separatism. Significantly, the document speaks of threats against Central Asia and China, thus linking the region and the Great Power in common security concerns (Swanström 2005) With the entry of Uzbekistan in 2001, the Shanghai Five became the 'Shanghai Cooperation Organisation' (SCO).

Already from 4-6 August 2003 the SCO conducted its first multilateral joint military exercise termed 'Cooperation 2003', emphasizing counterterrorism measures. In June 2004, the SCO opened a counterterrorist centre, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure or RATS, in Tashkent, furthering the organization's focus on counterterrorism (Sheives 2006: 213). Bilateral security arrangements also started taking place, with military aid conceded to Kyrgyzstan, who already in 2005 received US\$1.2 million worth of military equipment from China, and to Kazakhstan, who got US\$3 million for communications and for specialized forces (Olcott 2005: 335).

According to the literature, such a penetration in the Central Asian region responded to several factors, among which the most important were constituted by the need of keeping the Western province of Xinjiang, historically and culturally linked to Muslim Central Asia, outside the influence of terrorist forces. Other factors that have been mentioned are the need to engage in bilateral and multilateral constructive relations to project on the international scene the ideal of a peaceful rise, the need to

secure energy security to sustain the massive internal economic development and, to a lesser extent, to counter the US presence in the region due to the conflict in Afghanistan (Rumer 2002; Cohen 2006; Sheives 2006; Kavalski 2007: 48; Kaukenov 2009: 35; Kavalski 2010).

The most important consequence of China's renovated and bolstered engagement with Central Asia, however, has been that of making the Great Power structure around Central Asia more difficult to manage and more complex to interact with.

With respect to the third point (inextricably linked to the two above), Central Asian states felt their regional stability to be at stake precisely because of military activities in neighbouring Afghanistan. In particular, ideological linkages and joint-training between the Taliban movement and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) as well as the Hizb ut-Tahrir movement were a growing cause of concern, not only for Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (the former two neighbouring with Afghanistan, the latter having suffered from hostile incursions on its territory already in 1999) but also for Kazakhstan, which was sensitive to incursions and threats coming from the southern flanks of the region.

The systemic pressures deriving from the US intervention in Afghanistan, with the consequent entrance in the region of several Great Powers with (more often than not) competing and clashing interests and agendas presented the Central Asian states with the difficult task of maintaining a liveable and manageable regional system. In the words of a Central Asian representative of the UNRCCA, the task was and still is

to find arrangements for *coexistence and mutual relations* in the region in the light of the pressure of the Great Powers. After 9/11, Central Asia became and still is like a circle within a triangle, *trying to survive as a system* and to not be squeezed by one of the sides of the triangle and not to pick a side.¹⁶²

Such words are indeed consistent with another inside characterisation of the region, according to which the descriptions of Central Asia by Russian intellectuals as a buffer zone, or by US academics as a *cordon sanitaire* 'are unacceptable [to Central Asian leaders], because primarily these two positions imply their (Central Asia's)

¹⁶² Interview. The same views were expressed by Sultan Akimbekov, and have been recently expressed also by the Tajik political analyst Khudoberdi Kholiqnazarov, Head of the Centre for Strategic Studies under the President of Tajikistan (Asia Plus 2015).

subordination to the will and actions of external powers' (Tolipov 2010: 107).

Therefore, differently from the 1990s when Central Asia could develop as a system without being, to paraphrase Olcott, 'catapulted' into Great-Power politics, the international relations in Central Asia between Central Asian states had now to take place in the light of the presence of Great Powers in the region, which of course influenced (and still influence) the nature of the cooperation/competition dynamic in the region.

One of the effects of the presence of Great Power logics in the region has been what I call, from an ES perspective, a hyper-institutionalisation of sovereignty in the region, exactly as a normative protection against foreign penetration, as well as a peculiar interpretation of GPM. But more on this will be said below.

5.3 The Central Asian Cooperation Organisation

In the light of the tremendous changes that the international context was undergoing in the first years of the 2000s, the Central Asian states recognised that, despite the incipient growing differences between them, closer cooperation not just on economic matters, but also and especially on political ones (meant here as related to security, foreign policy and diplomacy) were needed and necessary. From the late 1990s to 2002, the year when the CACO was founded, several inter-presidential meetings were held to discuss renewed intra-regional cooperation.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 13 April 1999.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 24 June 1999.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 25 June 1999.

This section analyses the birth, the development and ultimately the demise of the CACO, the last international organisation purely Central Asian in membership. In particular, the analysis presented below attempts to answer the following questions: *what were the motivations behind the foundation of the CACO? What were the norms and rules embodied in it or, in ES terms, which primary institutions were represented in this secondary institution? Was it entirely successful in its operation and, more importantly, how should we measure its success or failure?*

In sum, this section intends to offer a deeper account of the experience of this regional organisation, escaping the usual narrative, already noted throughout the thesis so far, that regional experiments in Central Asia were a failure and ‘full stop’ (Bohr 2004; Allison 2008; Olcott 2011). We need to dig deeper, to reach intentions and motivations, to discover not just whether they were a failure, but more importantly *why they developed in that way*. And again, I think an ES analysis, being eclectic, multifaceted and all-encompassing, is more useful than narrower, and inevitably partial, purely realist or liberal explanations.

The need for Central Asian countries to cooperate in the face of the systemic forces operating in the region and in the light of the ongoing process of economic globalisation was voiced already less than two months after 9/11 by President

Nazarbayev who, addressing a session of the Kazakh National Academy of Sciences, argued 'I regard with enthusiasm the integration in our region', urging closer cooperation among Central Asian states themselves.¹⁶³ One month and a half later, toward the end of December 2001, the four leaders met in Tashkent (28 December) to adopt a joint declaration founding the new regional organisation.

That the development of a new organisation was spurred by the Afghan campaign and by the threats deriving from it was also confirmed by the Uzbek Foreign Ministry at that time, according to whom participants in the meeting would 'focus their attention on threats coming from international terrorism.'¹⁶⁴ In addition, the four participants at the meeting stressed that the new organization was to provide 'a unified zone of security and to develop joint actions on preserving peace and stability in the region neighbouring Afghanistan.'¹⁶⁵

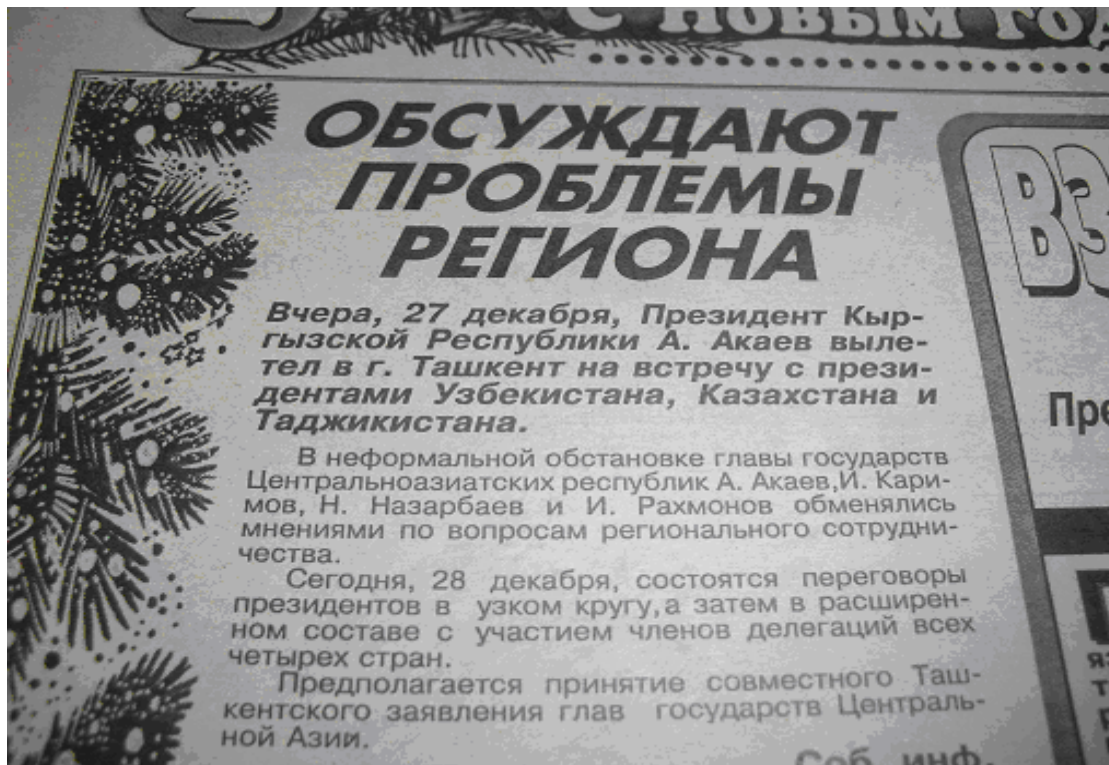


Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 27 December 2001.

¹⁶³ Associated Press International, 6 November 2001.

¹⁶⁴ RIA Novosti, 28 December 2001.

¹⁶⁵ United Press International, 28 December 2001.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 28 December 2001.

The impact of the change of the international environment surrounding the region on the institutionalisation of the CACO was also visible in official documents. As an example, an official position paper released by the Kazakh Institute of Strategic Studies, usually considered as an academic and more informal voice of Nazarbayev in foreign policy matters, spoke of the CACO's foundation as 'due primarily to the need to balance the relationship major players in the region: the US, Russia, China and European countries' (Dzhumasheva undated; Ushakova 2003).

The format of the meeting, the spirit in which the negotiations were conducted and the character of the newly established organisation were described by the Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov in a press conference in Astana on December 27. To him, the meeting of the heads of Central Asian states did 'not have a rigid agenda, and the conversation [was] going on in the regime of a political dialogue in two major directions: regional stability and regional economic cooperation'.¹⁶⁶ Islam Karimov, during the Tashkent meeting the day after, asked the audience not to call the organization 'a bloc' but to refer to it as 'an association'.¹⁶⁷ Already in these words, we can see how the CACO was different in format, aims and motivations from the CAU.

¹⁶⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁷ United Press International, 28 December 2001.

	CAU	CACO
Format	Strong institutionalisation	Looser political dialogue
Aims	Regional integration	Regional co-operation and co-ordination
Motivations	Mainly internal – Preservation of Soviet structures and ties	Mainly external – Preservation of regional stability in the light of the Afghan conflict

At the end of the meeting, the four leaders (Nazarbayev, Karimov, Akaev and Rahmon) agreed on the following:

- enhancement of cooperation in political, economic, scientific, technical and cultural spheres;
- development of mutual understanding on the issues concerning creation of a common safety zone;
- resolution of customs barriers and water resources problems;
- support to the US-led coalition in Afghanistan and to the interim administration of Hamid Karzai, therefore signalling the willingness of Central Asian states to escape a purely economic dimension of integration and to deal also with international political events.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 4 January 2002.

The organisation was officially founded in Almaty on 28 February 2002, when the Heads of State signed the Treaty on the Establishment of the 'Central Asian Cooperation Organisation' and the Regulations on the Committee of National Coordinators.



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 28 February 2002.

Within the treaty, from an ES perspective, several norms and institutions were adopted and internalised. As a matter of fact, following the well-known distinction made by Buzan between primary and secondary institutions (Buzan 2004: 167) the CACO was another secondary institution of the Central Asian region, embodying those rules and norms accepted as legitimate by all members.

The treaty followed the usual pattern of wording, and its preamble closely resembles all international agreements formerly signed between Central Asian states. References to common traditions, friendship and good-neighbourliness ('opirayas' na glubokie traditsii druzhby i dobrososedstva'), and to cultural unity and brotherhood of the peoples of Central Asia ('istoricheskoi i kul'turnoi obshnosti bratskikh narodov Tsentral'noi Azii') introduce the aims of the treaty which, as noted, relies more on cooperation than on integration (therefore symbolising a shift from the 'nostalgic solidarism' of the 1990s to a new, more realist, form of political pluralism):

- economic cooperation (especially in the fields of borders and customs control, as well as tariff policies);
- political cooperation;
- scientific-technical cooperation (especially in the field of transportation);
- cultural cooperation;
- security cooperation (mainly linked to extremism, narco-trafficking and terrorism);

all underpinned by respect for (Article 1 and Article 2)

- sovereignty;
- territorial integrity;
- members' equality;
- international law.

As in the case of the CAU treaty, there was no exclusive membership based on 'Central Asian membership criteria'. Rather, the membership was regulated by the respect and the sharing of the goals and principles informing the CACO organisational structure accepting also its obligation. It was therefore an 'open' treaty.

The main bodies of the newly established organisation were the following, as foreseen by Article 4:

- the Council of Heads of State and Prime Ministers;
- the Council of Foreign Ministers (named 'the working body' of the CACO), heads of industry ministries and agencies;
- the Committee of National Coordinators.

The Committee of National Coordinators, a new organ, was established by the Position on the Committee of National Coordinators as foreseen by Article 7 of the treaty founding the CACO. Its functions were the following (Article 3 of the Position):

- ensuring continuous and effective operation of the CACO;
- ensuring convergence and harmonization of positions at the CACO;
- strengthening cooperation and deepening integration within the CACO;

- promotion of interaction between interested bodies, agencies and organizations of the members of the CACO;
- approval of the agenda and draft documents submitted by the meeting of the Council of Heads of State and Prime Ministers and by the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of members of the CACO;
- monitoring the implementation of the obligations of states members of the CACO, adopted within the framework of the Organization within the competence of the National coordinators;
- analysis of the implementation of the members of the decisions of the CACO, the preparation and submission of proposals;
- drafting and submitting information material to the Council of the Heads of State and Prime Ministers and the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs;
- the decision of organizational and technical issues of the organs of the CACO.

To support the activity of the organisation, moreover, the treaty established the presence of National Focal Points, appointed on a national basis, with the task of coordinating the policies of the country he/she represented with those decided at the inter-governmental level within the CACO (Article 7 of the Position).

As can be seen, the regulatory and implementing bodies of the CACO gave state organs much power. No supranational institutions were created. This is another difference in comparison with the CAU that, although strongly influenced by state structures as well, had nonetheless the presence of supranational institutions such as the Central Asian Bank.

The strong inter-governmentalism, reflected also in the emphasis on the words ‘cooperation/coordination/consultation’ and in the adoption of the consensus-based decision-making procedure, is therefore another sign of a ‘pluralisation’ of the Central Asian regional system (Articles 4, 5 and 6). The contracting parties themselves referred to the CACO as a ‘more democratic and more flexible’ international organisation compared to the CAU.¹⁶⁸

Furthermore, the diminished emphasis on multilateralism and regional approach is exemplified by the provision in Article 6 according to which extraordinary meetings of the Council of Foreign Ministers could be convened only

168 Joint Statement of the Heads of State of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, CACO Summit, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 5-6 July 2003.

by request of *at least two* Member States and with the *consent of all Member States*. Such strict parameters, of course, had the effect of making bilateral arrangements more preferable. The interplay between regionalism and sovereignty, with the prevalence of the latter, is also observable in Article 11, where decision-making procedures are described:

decisions are taken by consensus by CACO bodies and implemented by Member States in accordance with their national legislation. Monitoring the implementation of the obligations of the Member States adopted within CACO is competence of the National Coordinators.

But then, it should be noted that the National Coordinators as well were subordinated to the respective Heads of States, and had to rely on the work of their Foreign Ministers (Ushakova 2003).

Again, what is observable here is the difficulty with which Central Asian states balanced their national, domestic interests and their own foreign-policy agendas with the recognition that the problems and the newly international conditions spurred by the Afghan conflict required a concerted, multilateral and collective position.¹⁶⁹

As we can see, therefore, there was already a significant difference between the previously established CAU and the CACO, that is, a recognition that the Central Asian states, in the light of their different modes of development, were slowly drifting apart from each other and therefore were contributing to a 'pluralisation' of the regional system.

The notion of integration, so compelling under the CAU architectonic structure, was now abandoned in favour of a more detached, pragmatic and short-term cooperation, in the interest of the sovereign preferences of member states. The 'quartet', as it was often called in the official press, was in the end giving away a more realistic approach to the development of intra-regional relations (Ushakova 2003). In addition, great proclamations about regional identity, solidarity ties and EU-modelled hopes were largely downplayed.¹⁷⁰

169 A document released by the Department of Media Relations of the Kazakh Senate stated that 'political terrorism remain[ed] a serious threat to the security and stability of all Central Asian states without exception'. The document also defined Central Asia as 'our region'. Document released before the CACO Summit in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on May 5, year missing. The text of the document was kindly forwarded to me by Dr Iqboljon Qoraboyev.

170 Nazarbayev, while signing the treaty establishing the CACO and after talks with the presidents of

The format of the CACO allowed now for strong bilateral relations, in addition to multilateral formats of dialogue. This bilateral relations, however, had to be conducted within the general normative framework of the 2002 Treaty.

Comparing the two foundational treaties, it is also noteworthy how in the CACO treaty the emphasis is much more on ‘practical’ cooperation, rather than on ideological, identity-related or integration-aimed. Therefore, the aims of the organisation were lowered to a more achievable level: rational use of natural joint and man-made resources, transport, energy, border delimitation and foreign policy coordination. Significantly, the aforementioned KISI paper speaks of economic integration in the region as ‘abandoned’.¹⁷¹

This, however, must not be conducive to a whole dismissal of the regional, institutional experiment. It would be incorrect, as a great part of the literature does, to neglect the small achievements of the CACO precisely only because small and not based on shared institutions and integrative measures. Indeed, it signals an initial acceptance by the countries of Central Asia that different political and economic trajectories may well be a consequential result of the gaining of independence and sovereignty.

In ES jargon, the establishment of the CACO represented the foundation of a secondary institution embodying pluralist values and norms, thus moving away from a solidarist, dead-letter international society to a pluralist but nonetheless still cooperative one (Murden 2009). In structural-relations terms, the foundation of the CACO represented a move from a developmental form of society aimed at deep integration to a conservative form of society achieving coexistence focusing on cooperation.

Within the framework of the CACO, several examples of cooperation may actually be found, thus to some extent disproving the idea that this was another ‘paper

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, stated that there was a need for ‘a new approach to our regional business’. Agence France Presse – English, 28 February 2002. One year later Akaev said: ‘We should use the rich experience of the EU, but apply to it to the regional distinctiveness of Central Asia, consolidating our efforts on the road to rapprochement’. Agence France Presse – English, 6 May 2003.

171 The original text reads: ‘Otkazavshis’ ot idei shirokoy i vseob yemlyushchey ekonomicheskoy integratsii, strany “chetverki” sosredotochili vnimaniye na konkretnykh zadachakh’ (‘Abandoning the idea of a broad and comprehensive economic integration of the country of “the quartet” focused on specific objectives’).

organisation.¹⁷² The fact that diplomatic and political dialogue was ongoing within the CACO was one of the factors that achieved some of the results listed below, as the organisation provided a forum where positions could be discussed.¹⁷³

- 27-28 December 2001 (on the eve of the first CACO meeting): meeting between Karimov and Rahmon to normalise Uzbek-Tajik relations; among the measures agreed on, there were the following:
 - twenty-five border points re-opened;
 - decrease of transit tariff for vehicles coming from Tajikistan;
 - Tajik debt reduced by 10% (from \$120 million to \$108 million);
 - resumption of the work of the Uzbekistan-Tajikistan intergovernmental commission (Jonson 2004: 92);
- August 2002: 70% of the Uzbek-Tajik border had been demarcated;
- 9 September 2002: agreement between Karimov and Nazarbayev inked in Astana to ultimate the delimitation of the Kazakhstan-Uzbek frontier; in this occasion, Nazarbayev said that ‘with the agreement, no undecided questions remained between the two republics’ and that the Uzbek-Kazakh border ‘would be civilized, and there would be no wire entanglements on it’;¹⁷⁴
- early October 2002: agreement between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan demarcating the 1050 km-long border, apart from four disputed areas (Jonson 2004: 92);
- October 2002: improvement on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border thanks to progress in delimitation and demarcation of borders, especially thanks to meetings between local representatives from the Batken and Sughd regional administrations;
- 16 July 2003: draft agreement on the division of the Caspian seafloor between Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in Astana. The parties also finalized catalogues

172 Interview with Zhar Zhardykan.

173 Interview with official Uzbek source.

174 RosBusinessConsulting Database, 9 September 2002.

pinpointing the key spots of the coastline and of the midline dividing the Caspian Sea (this agreement was drafted outside the CACO platform);¹⁷⁵

- 27 December 2003: agreement on trade, border protection and foreign policy matters between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In the occasion of the press-conference following the agreement, Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Askar Aitmatov stated: ‘I hope that the cooperation model to be established by Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan will become an example not only for Central Asian states but for the whole CIS’;¹⁷⁶
- 29 December 2003: agreement between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan on water and energy supply deals. The agreement was negotiated and signed by the Tajik Prime Minister Aqil Aqilov and the Uzbek Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev. On that occasion, Uzbek Foreign Ministry spokesman Ilkhom Zakirov said the visit by Aqilov and other senior ministers visit signalled ‘the mutual desire to finally sit down and discuss a wide range of cooperation issues’.¹⁷⁷

Other examples of cooperation and successful coordination, this time in a more authentic multilateral format, were the following:

- 5 February 2002: meeting of Central Asian foreign ministers to discuss the upgrading of cooperation between the states on foreign issues within the framework of the newly established organisation;¹⁷⁸
- 5 July 2002: opening of the Regional Ecology Centre (REC), also with Turkmenistan, with the aim of creating a single ecology database for Central Asia;¹⁷⁹
- 5 October 2002: the four presidents signed a joint communiqué at the end of the Dushanbe Summit, pledging to contribute to the resolution of priority issues in the region, which first of all include the creation of water and power,

175 RIA Novosti, 16 July 2003.

176 RIA Novosti, 27 December 2003.

177 Associated Press International, 29 December 2003.

178 Xinhua General News Service, 6 February 2002.

179 RIA Novosti, 5 July 2002.

transport and food consortiums in consultation with ADB, IBRD, the WB, FAO and the UN following Kazakhstan's proposal, plus draft agreement on a common space of television and radio broadcasting in the region to create a common information space;



Source: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 8 October 2002.

- November 2002: first inter-parliamentary CACO forum held in Tashkent to discuss harmonisation of legislation in security and anti-terrorism fields;
- 1 August 2003: at a meeting in the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh, the interior ministers of the four members of the CACO agreed to harmonise anti-terrorist laws, and also signed an agreement to improve interaction in countering regional security threats;¹⁸⁰
- 5 May 2004: second inter-parliamentary CACO forum held in Tashkent to discuss harmonisation of legislation in security and anti-terrorism fields.

As we can see, the situation in Central Asia after 2001 was far from un-cooperative. Lena Jonson, in her comprehensive analysis of the changing security environment in

¹⁸⁰ Associated Press International, 1 August 2003.

Central Asia after 9/11, argues that ‘the stimulus for bilateral cooperation was provided by an external actor’ (2004: 92). While there is certainly part of truth in this statement, I would say that rather than the *stimulus*, the US engagement in Afghanistan provided the *context* for cooperation.

The stimulus came in fact *from within*. With a decreased level of threat at their borders, Central Asian states could devote diplomatic and political resources to face their long-lasting common problems, benefiting from the mistakes made in the past (mainly, excessive integrationist ambition incompatible with simultaneous state- and nation-building processes). The stimulus was endogenous, in the sense that the leaders of the region recognised a form of cooperation, or even reciprocal consultation was necessary not just to counter the threats coming from Afghanistan, but also, as diplomats pointed out, to maintain their regional space free from excessive intrusion from the systemic, global level.¹⁸¹

Also with respect to foreign issues and coordination of foreign policies some notable convergence was observable. The Central Asia countries, first of all, spoke of themselves as a region. They clearly had a sense of a regional space that had to be managed in concert, even if with some difficulties, misunderstandings and mistrusts. The ‘paper-organisation’ argument does not explain *why* these states set up such associations. More importantly, the fact that CACO achieved limited successes cannot rule out the fact that those successes were present.

Realist explanations, focusing on power, rivalry and confrontation, have difficulties in accounting for the examples of cooperation described above. Liberal explanations, on the other hand, cannot find ground as such cooperation was not developmental in character, but rather conservative. As it is clear from today’s international relations in Central Asia, the establishment of secondary institutions and international (regional regimes) has not been successful. Therefore, how to illustrate regional international politics at the beginning of the new millennium? The answer is, as a regional pluralist international society.

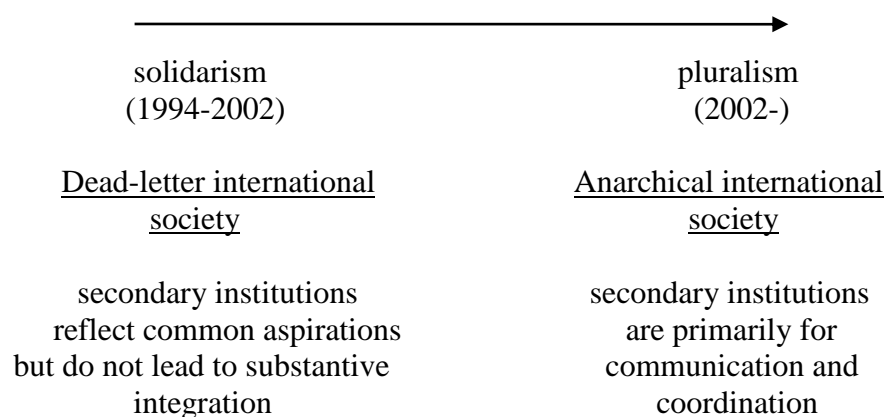
Such a pluralist international society, as described above, adopted sovereignty, international law, thick borders and non-interference as its cornerstones, and the

181 Asked about the presence of foreign powers in the region, Muratbek Imanaliyev, Kyrgyz Foreign Minister, said: ‘We felt the need to widen our circle of cooperation ... raise our cooperation to a new level’, while Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissoy stated: ‘There is no alternative to unifying our efforts in the region’. Agence France Presse – English, 5 February 2002.

solidarist impulses underpinning the renewed attempt to cooperation were not sufficiently strong to underpin fruitful multilateral efforts. The experience of the CACO, despite the (few) positive results listed above, was brief because of three main factors:

- the prevalence of state sovereignty and national interest over regional burden-sharing and coordination;
- the development of clearer domestic agendas that made state leaders realise their diverging paths;
- the awareness that in the light of the above bilateral consultations were more preferable and more manageable.

Moreover, issues of inter-personal mistrust, the difficult international context described above, the attempts of Russia to re-appropriate itself of the Central Asian sphere (demonstrated by the Saint Petersburg Treaty in 2005 with which the CACO was merged with the EurAsEC) and financial shortcomings, which clashed with the ambition of the regionalist programs, characterised in a negative way the path of intra-regionalism in Central Asia.



Clearly, what is argued here is not that a sudden shift occurred in the way Central Asian states have been managing their international relations. The movement along the spectrum has been gradual and sometimes even hidden to the protagonists themselves. In the words of a Central Asian expert acquainted with the Central Asian regionalist experiences,

[state leaders] tried so much to integrate and work together from early 1990s until mid 2000s because they did not know they were so much different. They realised during the process! I mean, they realised in the process of trying efforts, during the efforts of being together, solving issues together, creating institutions for different purposes, for common purposes, but then they realised they had a national interest, which is something they had to operationalise, they discovered it in the process! And they decided “no, we can’t really compromise our national interest for this regional integration”. That’s why they were trying, they were putting this on paper, but then the reality was different. Also, and perhaps more important, it is what I call the “resource” problem, the know-how. I am really materialistic, I mean money! They did not have it!¹⁸²

Furthermore, I had the opportunity to interview behind close doors a former Kyrgyz diplomat who used to work in all the Central Asian international organisations. In his words the notion of a waning dead-letter solidarism at the beginning of 2000s is evident:

In 2001, there was the Ashgabat expert level meeting on Priorities and Principles of the region. The presidents, once more, saw *they had to do something together*. Yes, they of course had the feeling they had to be together. Simply, they could not find mechanisms. *But the feeling was there*. The CAU was dealing with integration, while the CACO more with transnational threats, less integration. In terms of success, however, I would say they were both not very effective. *I remember we ourselves did not believe in it. We thought it would not work.*¹⁸³

So, the CACO was nothing but the institutional representation of the change in the modalities of relations between Central Asian states, of the surge of a strong pluralism that would come to characterise Central Asian international society for the next years. The crucial argument made here, however, was that it would be incorrect to characterise all these experiences as plain ‘failures’. As we have seen, positive results were yielded as well, even if far below the expectations of those who believed in a deeper integration between Central Asian states.

More importantly, they were positive results *if assessed within a pluralist framework of analysis*. For example, thanks to the activities carried out in the CACO and to the several platforms for communication and dialogue that this institution provided, Central Asian states managed to find common positions within international

¹⁸² Interview with Expert in Kyrgyzstan, 17 November 2013.

¹⁸³ Interview with former Kyrgyz diplomat, 2 May 2014.

forums such as the UN and the OSCE.¹⁸⁴ Once again, coordination and communication were perhaps not as sensational achievements as deeper economic integration and resource-pooling, but nonetheless helped regional states to develop and enhance their understanding of norms, rules and values informing their foreign policies in a pluralist environment (Ushakova 2003).

Such understanding has proved, I argue, to be of the utmost importance for the resilience of the whole regional system, as I will show below. The term ‘failure’ associated to the CACO experience reflects, once more, an unjustified solidarist expectation that very young states, still in the process of formation of their state- and nation-structures, of their national interests and of their understanding of the international environment, would decide to dispense their sovereign rights in favour of close and deep integration.

With the Saint Petersburg treaty of 2005, the CACO was merged with the Russia-led EurAsEC, and therefore Central Asian regional organisations disappeared once for all. The question now is to try to understand whether *the absence of regional international organisations* is the same thing as *the absence of a society of states*, taken in its minimal meaning of a group of states following shared norms, rules and institutions to coexist and maintain order in their environment. I argue that the answer is ‘no’, and that Central Asia still shows a degree of ‘societiness’ even in the absence of regional secondary institutions. The two case-studies that follow, the Osh events and the Rogun Dam will serve as an illustration of my point.

5.4 The Osh crisis in 2010: norms, rules and pluralist practices of security

Arguably, an area where it may be useful to think of an international society at play it is usually that of conflict. How conflict is managed, contained, dealt with by the parts and framed by the actors can reveal a lot about the social nature of the environment where the conflict breaks out.

The conflict in Osh that erupted in June 2010 between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks could have been a paramount example of collapse not just of bilateral relations between two states (Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) but also, more widely, of Central Asian regional stability (a conflict may well have caused a domino-effect where other

184 Interview with Uzbek Source 1 and Uzbek Source 2; interview with former Kyrgyz Diplomat.

consistent minorities of Central Asian states insist on other states' territories).¹⁸⁵ Below I give a brief account of what happened in the days of the crisis (roughly 10-15 June 2010), and then I focus on those narratives at the high level referring to norms, rules and institutions that may lead us to think of an international society at play.

5.4.1 Events in Osh: a short synopsis

It must be stressed since the beginning that the purpose of this section is *not* to provide a detailed account of what actually happened in Osh, but rather to give the reader a comprehensive summary of those events the management of which makes possible to speak of norms and rules at play in Central Asia. For a more detailed account of the Osh events, therefore, I point to the relevant literature (Bond and Koch 2010; Khakimov 2011; Matveeva, Savin et al. 2012; Megoran 2013; Rezvani 2013).

The inter-ethnic clashes that happened in the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh, 40 km far from the Uzbek border, need to be analysed in the context of the ousting of the Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in April 2010, when eighty-six people died in the clashes. This led to the formation of a Provisional Government (PG) in charge of establishing a parliamentary system *in lieu* of the former presidential one (Matveeva 2011: 4).

In the wake of the uprisings and of Bakiyev's removal, the situation in the south deteriorated: while Bakiyev's supporters tried to cling to power, Uzbeks found themselves less protected than their Kyrgyz counterparts due to their under-representation in security bodies (such as the police and prosecutors). While Uzbeks were creating their own security arrangements, Kyrgyz thought the PG would rely more on Uzbeks than on themselves. Since the two sides relied on their next kin for self-protection, the fight acquired an inter-ethnic dimension. The epicentre of the clashes was Osh, and violence spread also to Jalalabad, Suzak and Bazar-Korgan (Matveeva 2011: 5).

Many Uzbeks, mostly women and children, fled to the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border hoping to through the frontier. The initial response of Uzbek border guards was to not let anyone inside the country. However, as the clashes became more and more violent, with a death toll higher and higher, Islam Karimov gave the order to open the frontier

¹⁸⁵ The then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Kanat Saudabayev, serving as OSCE Chair, stated that the unrest in southern Kyrgyzstan 'could have a highly destabilizing effect, not only on Central Asia, but also far beyond its borders'. Thai News Service, 19 July 2010.

and to provide the refugees with shelter and protection.¹⁸⁶

Relying on Kyrgyz Ministry of Healthcare's statistics, Anna Matveeva concludes that 'altogether up to 470 were killed (74% Uzbek, 25% Kyrgyz and 1% belonged to other ethnic groups). Over 90% were men' (Matveeva 2011: 6).

5.4.2 Norms and rules in play

After presenting these events, we are clearly faced with a theoretical conundrum: why did Uzbekistan not intervene to protect its citizens in southern Kyrgyzstan? While Anna Matveeva asks herself why *Russia* did not intervene (2011: 9), thus implicitly assuming the existence of a hegemonic system in Central Asia with Russia as its apex, I believe this conundrum is even more puzzling if we apply the usual, often-applied realist framework of analysis to the region. Uzbekistan had an overwhelming military force in comparison to Kyrgyzstan; the Kyrgyz regime was weak and still in search of consolidation after the ousting of Bakiyev; the Osh riots could have spurred other riots in border regions of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan; the massacres perpetrated by the Kyrgyz in Osh could have been, perhaps through a thorny legal argument, used to justify an intervention by the Uzbek motherland.

In addition, problems of gas deliveries and border delimitation between the two countries and fears of social unrest possibly spreading to Uzbekistan (and other states, see below) worsened the nature of bilateral relations. A reaction from the Uzbek side, therefore, was expected by everyone.¹⁸⁷ Yet, nothing happened. Why?

Departing from Matveeva's characterisation of Uzbekistan's inaction as 'isolationist' (2011: 11), I argue that considerations of international law, diplomatic conventions, the nature of informal communication in Central Asia and principles of sovereignty and non-intervention constituted the reliable net of 'safety mechanisms' I mentioned above. In more general terms, I argue that an international society logic was in play during the Osh events, not a plain realist one. According to some sources, Uzbek troops were already stationing on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, ready to intervene on the Kyrgyz soil. They were just waiting for the mandate from Islam Karimov. The public opinion also was stirred by nationalist sentiments and moved by a strong will

¹⁸⁶ However, not all the check-points were opened. The border stayed closed in those parts where low-scale conflict was taking place (Matveeva 2011: 6).

¹⁸⁷ 'Kyrgyzstan expected Uzbekistan to intervene, we believed it was just a matter of time'. Interview with former Kyrgyz Diplomat.

to help their compatriots across the border.¹⁸⁸

Yet, it was the personal decision of Islam Karimov not to intervene. In explaining his decision, he made references to principles of international law and the utmost, paramount rules of a minimal, pluralist international society: the respect of each other's sovereignty and the respect of the principle of non-intervention.

Indeed, in the whole presidential administration of Tashkent, two logics were in play. On one hand, there was mere calculation. Intervention, even if welcomed by Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, would have spurred a regional conflict and involved also (unwelcome) Great Powers. On the other hand, there was normative belief. During the time necessary to decide the course of action, in the government there were continuous considerations based on sovereignty, non-interference and international law. An interviewee working for the Uzbek administration at that time told me that 'even if geopolitical and opportunistic windows were available, we could not do as we pleased, we constantly had in mind the norms, the "red lines", if you want, of the international system'.¹⁸⁹

The prevention of bilateral and regional collapse was prevented, I argue, thanks to the interplay of three different mechanisms. These mechanisms reflect a pluralist ES logic:

- international law (respect for sovereignty and non-interference);
- continuous diplomatic interaction both at the bilateral and at the regional level;
- prevalence of the *raison d'état*/système over the rights of people ('order over justice').

In the justifications provided by Islam Karimov and the Uzbek establishment for not intervening in Kyrgyzstan, we find references to principles of international law, the respect of sovereignty, the value of non-interference as a paramount bedrock of international relations and considerations of international law as the basis on which states should relate to each other (Fumagalli 2010).

188 Interview with Expert in Kyrgyzstan; interview with Marat Kazakhbayev. According to Kyrgyz State Border Service Deputy Commander Cholponbek Turusbekov, Uzbekistan sent special units from its border guard forces toward the border with Kyrgyzstan to reinforce its protection. *Central Asia & Caucasus Business Weekly*, 15 June 2010.

189 Interview with Official Uzbek source; similar arguments were made in an interview with two representatives of the Institute for Strategic and Regional studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Tashkent, December 13, 2013.

In the Uzbek Foreign Minister's statement on the Kyrgyz crisis released on 9 April 2010, the opening line was the following: 'The events taking place in Kyrgyzstan are, first of all, *the internal affair* of the Kyrgyz Republic' (UZA 2010). Furthermore, at the meeting of the SCO Summit held in Tashkent on June 14, 2010, Islam Karimov argued that '[Uzbeks] believe this is an internal affair of Kyrgyzstan, and *that says everything*' (UzReport 2010b).

Speculations over Karimov's use of international law have been abundant. Three, in particular, could have been the counter-arguments against his professed adherence to international law. The first one is that Uzbekistan is already suffering from over-population at home. Incorporating Kyrgyz Uzbeks into Uzbekistan's borders would mean to worsen the socio-economic situation of the country, and therefore it was in the interest of Uzbekistan to not intervene.

The second one is that the Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan is more liberal and open-minded than Uzbeks at home, and therefore their incorporation would have constituted a menace to Karimov's regime from a political viewpoint. Again, it was not in the interest of Uzbekistan to intervene.

The third one is that Karimov understood that such a move might have caused a domino effect in the region and that Russia could have taken advantage of it, stirring conflict and putting Central Asian states one against each other. Therefore, again, it was not in the interest of Uzbekistan to intervene. But all these three counter-arguments miss a very important point: that to follow a rule because it is in somebody's interest *is still to follow a rule*.

As Buzan has shown (2004: 128-138; see also Wendt 1999), a norm can be accepted (and implemented) via three, not necessarily exclusive, mechanisms of internalisation: coercion, calculation, and belief. These three modalities of internalisation of a norm differ in terms of *strength*, but not of *result*. The fact that a norm is followed because one thinks it is right to do so or because one is forced to do so does not mean that the norm itself is not followed. What, instead, differs, is that the *future commitment* to that norm will be far more uncertain in case of coercion and calculation instead of in case of belief. But there is more. Karimov decided to not intervene while making *reference* to a body of rules and norms known as international law.

Keeping in mind what we have said in Chapter 3, the fact that he used it as a *justification* for his inaction, for his restraint, tell us that these norms and rules have a

validity, a recognition, a *meaning* in the region. He did not just say ‘I am not intervening because this would create disorder in the region’. He did just not say ‘I would intervene but I cannot calculate the consequences’. Conversely, he said that he was not intervening because of the above and exactly *because of a set of norms and rules prohibiting him to do so*.¹⁹⁰ Whether instrumentally or not, the fact that he mentioned international law as a constraint tells us that such a constraint is perceived in the region as having some sort of power. In the words of a former Kyrgyz diplomat,

Uzbeks were being massacred. But Karimov did not intervene. We are still grateful to Karimov, you know. *Maybe also for his personal interest, but does this matter? He followed a principle of international law [...]* I can tell you, as I was working in the security council of Kyrgyzstan at that time, that it was his personal decision not to intervene. Sure, it was also a matter of convenience. He feared a domino effect you know. He wanted to preserve order. Yet, in that case, Uzbekistan’s national interest *conformed to international law*.¹⁹¹

Kazakhstan and Tajikistan followed the same principles, and adhered to a strong, pluralist conception of sovereignty paired with a clear-cut understanding of non-intervention.¹⁹² Kazakhstan, which nonetheless was actively involved diplomatically (see below) and which chaired the OSCE, maintained a position conforming to non-intervention, as it feared problems with its own Uzbeks in southern Kazakhstan province. Therefore, Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks migrating northwards to Russia in the aftermath of violence were only discreetly allowed to traverse through Kazakhstan’s territory (Matveeva 2011: 8). Bulat Auelbaev, Head of Department of Foreign Policy Analysis and Strategy of the Kazakh Institute of Strategic Studies (KISI), recalls how

when there was unrest in Kyrgyzstan, experts in Kazakhstan and Central Asia were discussing whether neighbouring countries should take lead, even intervene and even protect subjects, or areas,

190 I was told that ‘Uzbek people inside Uzbekistan really criticised Karimov a lot for being inactive, for not taking action, because he said “this is an internal issue of Kyrgyzstan, and we won’t intervene, we don’t have any official normative platform to intervene”. That is why he was clear on it’. Interview with Expert in Kyrgyzstan.

191 Interview with former Kyrgyz Diplomat, May 2, 2014.

192 ‘Our position on Osh was diplomatic. Our Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that we were worried, anxious. In any case, we are not ready to intervene, maybe some organisation, like CSTO with some of our troops, but for us as a country is better not to intervene, in any case’. Interview with Sultan Akimbekov. Also, in an interview with two Official Sources at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, I was told that ‘war was imminent, but everyone refrained from that because all states in Central Asia were conscious of the potential risks’.

in Kyrgyzstan. This was in 2010. I personally expressed publicly that *there was no way to intervene because there was a norm of sovereignty, of non-intervention, Kyrgyzstan was an independent country and therefore no one could take a small nail of it*. This approach of non-intervention and sovereignty protection proved to be *the right thing to do, exactly because it's a principle of international law*. [...] Also Karimov, generally speaking, respected sovereignty and international law; he just opened the border for the refugees and after some time he returned those refugees and *in this way they did not break the rules*.¹⁹³

Conversely, Tajikistan demonstrated its commitment to non-interference by categorically *denying involvement* in the events in Kyrgyzstan. Answering to accusations of direct involvement and violence-stirring moves on the Kyrgyz soil moved by Kyrgyzstan against Tajikistan, General Abdullo Nazarov, the head of the National Security Ministry's office in the south eastern region of Badakhshan, said that reports were unfounded that he and other Tajiks were either involved in fomenting or directly taking part in the deadly violence in southern Kyrgyzstan between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz (RFE/RL 2010).

In an effort to back these theoretical intuitions with words and accounts coming from analysts, diplomats and academic acquainted with the Osh events (or who even took part in their resolution at the high level), I directly asked several practitioners in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan as well as in Kazakhstan about why Karimov and other leaders decided to not intervene. All of them, immediately, referred to legal and normative consideration. For example, Zakir Chotaev, Assistant Director of the Central Asian Research Centre and Professor of International Law at the Turkish-Manas University in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, stated that

in Central Asia, there are observations of international law rules, especially on borders and enclaves. [...] We have problems, but also *restraint*. There are negotiations, and Uzbekistan tries to apply the rules as well. In Osh, they did not intervene, the elite understood that such a conflict would have been against Karimov. Again, international law was respected. The rules concerning sovereignty, respect of sovereignty, restraints on borders, territorial integrity and non-interference are observed in Central Asia. And also, they are observed *mutually* [emphasis in his tone]. There are *expectations*. The rulers in Central Asian countries understand very clear that *military means can not be used to resolve the problems*.¹⁹⁴

193 Interview with Bulat Auelbaev.

194 Interview.

Marat Kazakhbayev, senior analyst at the Institute of Public Policy in Bishkek, argued that

Karimov did not intervene in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 because *he was oriented towards respecting international law*. There were rumours that an aggression to Kyrgyzstan had been planned, the troops were actually at the border, but he avoided that again because *that would have constituted international aggression*. This is why even now the Kyrgyz government considers Karimov's in the highest esteem, he really avoided a major conflict.¹⁹⁵

Focusing more on the interplay between interest, calculation and belief, Askar Nursha, political expert in Kazakhstan, linked Karimov's decision to not intervene both to legal consideration and the wider regional context:

During Osh, there was a threat that Uzbekistan would send the troops. It was believed that ODKB [CSTO] troops would deteriorate the situation. In the end, the conflict did not happen because of Karimov's wisdom. They [the Uzbeks] did not send the troops *because it would mean to send troops in a different country, and therefore it would constitute international aggression*. Uzbekistan did not want to be aggressive. According to many Uzbek experts, *Uzbekistan also did not intervene because it did not want to give a reason for ODKB [CSTO] to intervene*.¹⁹⁶

The wider, fundamental function that positivist international law plays in the international relations within the region is explained by Zhenis Kembayev, Professor of International Law in Kazakhstan, exactly making reference to the Osh events:

what I can see is that Central Asia is fully committed to the basic principles of international law. That's what all countries are in favour of, what they support and will support, because it is in their vital interest. It's a matter of survival. In the 1990s, all countries were preoccupied by their own internal problems, but all countries wanted civil war in Tajikistan to come to an end, because it could spread to other countries and it was potentially very dangerous. It was a real war, with many losses...Osh was a conflict of different category, other countries decided to categorise it as internal problem. They did not intervene, even Uzbekistan. *Because all of them, all Central Asian countries, may incur in the same, none of them wants other countries to intervene in their domestic affairs. Osh was exactly what the Central Asian understanding of international law is!* It's bloody, it's tragic, it's something that should not happen, but they just did not intervene.¹⁹⁷

195 Interview.

196 Interview.

197 Interview.

But as said, also respect for sovereignty, Westphalian sovereignty (and its derivative institution of non-intervention and respect of legitimate borders) in Central Asia played a pivotal role in the management of the Osh crisis. According to Irina Chernykh, a foreign policy and security expert in Kazakhstan,

in the region with the Central Asian actors we have a mixed situation. Of course you remember the Osh and Jalalabad events. In this situation, *all Central Asian states refused to intervene in Kyrgyzstan [...] officially to respect the idea of sovereignty*. In the region, at the very high political level, *we still have a common value of what sovereignty is*.¹⁹⁸

As anticipated, diplomacy is the other institution (in ES terms) that, I argue, helped maintain regional order and stability. Against the common narrative of Central Asian states as not talking to each other, intense diplomatic consultations were carried out *daily* between the Uzbek government and the Kyrgyz one, especially between Islam Karimov himself and Roza Otunbayeva, the Kyrgyz interim president. Karimov held also phone conversations with Nursultan Nazarbayev in order to assess the potential regional implications of what was going on in Osh.¹⁹⁹ In the words of one of the interviewees I spoke to, who worked for the Uzbek Presidential Administration at that time, it was exactly because of these diplomatic interactions that a major crisis was avoided:

do you remember Osh events, right? I remember, I was in Tashkent, in the administration, everything was very difficult, *there were different options on the table*. Even intervention, you know? But intervention would have been difficult, and *wrong*. To our mind, this would have constituted an act of international aggression, therefore against international law. In the end, *Mr. Karimov decided to support Ms. Otunbayeva*. There was the famous Bukhara Declaration, when he stated ‘Uzbek soldiers won’t stomp [sic] their feet outside Uzbek borders’. *They wrote each other; there were consultations, they exchanged letters*. I remember this.²⁰⁰

198 Interview.

199 Interview with former Kyrgyz Diplomat. He also mentioned possible discussions between Karimov and President Rahmon of Tajikistan, but was less sure. Aside from Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbayev, other phone conversations involved Dimitri Medvedev, Roza Otunbayeva, Kanat Saudabayev and Zhanibek Karibzhanov (respectively Foreign Minister and Deputy Chairman of the lower house of the Kazakh parliament). Russia & CIS Military Weekly, 10 September 2010.

200 Interview with Official Uzbek source.

Karimov himself gave a personal, detailed account of what happened in those days, of his diplomatic contacts with Ms. Roza Otunbayeva, of his adherence to international law and diplomatic protocol:

I remember that morning, when Roza Otunbayeva suddenly called me early on the morning of 11 June and we talked for a long time. *I promised, and kept this promise, that no one would cross the border into Kyrgyzstan, in any way, and I kept my word.* But it was not an easy task. This prevented the situation from getting worse, *this ensured the certain normalization that currently exists in Kyrgyzstan...* Taking this into account, imagine for a minute [what could have happened] if even a single Uzbek serviceman had crossed the border. Osh is no more than 40 km away from [eastern Uzbek region of] Andijon, only 40 km. And only 15 km away from the border. If even one person had crossed the border, I believe, it would have caused new bloody slaughter similar to that which took place there. Everyone who is present here and listening to me understands well that *this could have happened.* And, *with the Kyrgyz president, our contribution was that we prevented it.*²⁰¹

Another diplomatic move made by the Uzbek side in connection to the Osh events to defuse, cool down the tensions was to attribute the conflicts to unidentified third parties rather than to the Kyrgyz government itself.

In a statement issued on June 12, 2010, the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs argued the following: ‘we have no doubt that all this is taking place under the instigation of forces, whose interests are totally far from the interests of the Kyrgyz people’ (UzReport 2010a), while Islam Karimov, in an interview with the press, said that ‘it’s not the fault of Uzbeks or Kyrgyz. It’s sabotage organized and orchestrated from outside. The forces that organized this sabotage tried to involve Uzbekistan in this conflict’.²⁰² In addition, Central Asian governments and Uzbekistan in particular were quick in recognising Roza Otunbayeva as acting President, a move meant to define a clear interlocutor and to avoid the perception that in Kyrgyzstan there was a void of power, something that could have been used instrumentally by the parties in the conflict.²⁰³

The full observance of the institution of diplomacy during the Osh events was visible at the regional level as well as the global one, especially thanks to the several

201 BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, 13 December 2010. Emphasis added.

202 Russia & CIS Military Daily, 21 June 2010.

203 BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, 30 June 2010.

diplomatic ties established by Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan with extra-regional parties and international organisations. In particular, the IFRC, the Red Cross, the UN Office in Tashkent, the UN Secretary General, and the Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT) were operating in the crisis, with several members of these organisations helping directly on the ground to solve the crisis diplomatically, preventing the eruption of an even more violent conflict (UzReport 2010c; UzReport 2010d; UzReport 2010e).

Furthermore, at the very end of the conflict and riots, the whole stabilisation process was followed diplomatically by Roza Otunbayeva, Islam Karimov, Dimitri Medvedev and Nursultan Nazarbayev, through meetings and phone-calls.²⁰⁴

The third mechanism I have mentioned is the prevalence of the *raison d'état* over more cosmopolitan readings of regional politics. And this is a perfect example of a Westphalian international society in play. The prevalence of order, stability, coexistence at the state level was deemed to be more important than people's lives and security concerns. The survival of the regional system itself was more desirable than the survival of sub-state actors. By not intervening in Kyrgyzstan, Karimov made explicit not only that war is a *taboo* in Central Asia, but also that the region as a whole has the priority over the individuals inhabiting it. This is a state-centric reading of the norms of sovereignty and international law, which was supported by regional peers.

In the end, the Kyrgyz authorities recognised the importance of Uzbekistan's decision not to intervene, and the choice of Karimov to follow international law (again, either for interest or for normative belief), especially in its dictates of respect of sovereignty and non-interference. Abdygany Erkibayev, chairman of the Kyrgyz Inquiry Commission on the Osh events, even recommended that Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbayeva present a state award to Uzbek President Islam Karimov, who had chosen not to interfere in Kyrgyzstan's internal affairs during the June 2010 events. 'Thanks to Karimov's policy', he said, 'we managed to avoid interstate complications and a regional war.'²⁰⁵ Otunbayeva herself showed appreciation of Uzbekistan's

204 Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), 13 June 2010. Also, a high-level working group for the revitalisation of the economic activities in Kyrgyzstan was set up led by First Deputy Prime Minister Umirzak Shukeev which included the heads of the relevant ministries of Kazakhstan. Otunbayeva said the Kyrgyz side formed a similar working group. The establishment of the two coordinated working groups was coordinated by Nazarbayev and Otunbayeva themselves. Russia & CIS General Newswire, 12 July 2010.

205 Central Asia General Newswire, 11 January 2011; BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, January 11, 2011.

international behaviour on that occasion. She said adamantly ‘We are very grateful to the government of Uzbekistan and Islam Karimov for their balanced position. He took a big, brave step: he saved these people’s lives’ (Kremlin.ru 2010).

That the acts of Uzbekistan conformed to a shared script, template, canvas of norms, and expected behaviour, was evident in the gratitude and admiration of state authorities in the region, especially, again, in Kyrgyzstan:

The Kyrgyz government was very grateful. Otunbayeva and Atambayev understood the importance of the action of Karimov. They used all public statements and speeches to be thankful to Karimov. They even said ‘our brother’, ‘*our Central Asian brother*’, you know, these kind of discourses...you could perceive it, it was not artificial. *It was sincere.*²⁰⁶

That Karimov’s move conformed to a shared, regional understanding of how international law and sovereignty should be played out in the region is demonstrated also by Kazakhstan’s attitude towards the current events in Crimea. Karimov’s example of non-interference has been recently compared to the present state of affairs in Ukraine. In a recent interview on international political developments in Ukraine, Askar Nursha affirmed that

It is worth pointing out that Central Asia views the events in Ukraine more critically due to a complicated interethnic situation in our region; states, except for Kazakhstan, still have territorial disputes. Having China as a neighbour, which dominates in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with its goal of confronting three threats – separatism, extremism and terrorism, has to be taken into account. This explains the *special approach to sovereignty in our region*, and *deployment of troops for the protection of national minorities can hardly be supported*. For example, *Islam Karimov could act in the same way during the Osh events of 2010 in order to protect the Uzbek minority living in the south of Kyrgyzstan, but he did not and was appreciated for that in the region and abroad*. Violation of these principles may undermine trust between states.²⁰⁷

206 Interview with Expert in Kyrgyzstan.

207 Interview.

An important question that arises from the analyses above, and indeed inherently linked to it, is what kind of *security* environment existed in the region at that time. As has been argued, ‘the relationship between international rules and norms on one hand and the practice/s of security in world [in this case regional] politics on the other clearly encourages an investigation of the ways in which the relationship between international society and security might be conceived’ (Bellamy and McDonald 2004: 308). Anna Matveeva, for example, argues that both the CSTO and the SCO proved to be purposeless in the management of the crisis, and that such institutions showed their security-providing inadequacy in the (non-) management of the Osh riots (2011: 12).

Yet, if we have to conduct an ES analysis of the security arrangements in play in the region, we should not be surprised that the pluralistic, communitarian and state-centric spirit of the society of states present there did not allow for breaches of sovereignty and suspension of the principle of non-intervention for humanitarian purposes. As David Lewis has noted, Central Asia is ‘a complex political-security environment’, where different organisations with different memberships and agendas (OSCE, CSTO, SCO) ‘both compete and cooperate in responding to security concerns in the region’ (2013: 2).

These different international organisations, as said, bring along with their membership a different set of ideas, norms and security-related discourses that tend to fall in two different, quite opposite, camps: a liberal understanding of security and conflict-management (OSCE) emphasising democratisation, human rights and more broadly human security, and a traditional understanding of security (CSTO and SCO), focusing on state-resilience, state-protection and emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference (Lewis 2013: 3-4). In the Osh events, this second understanding of security was visible in more than one respect. The OSCE, for example, decided to send a police mission to attempt to contain and tame the violence, but in the end this measure was rejected by the Kyrgyz authorities themselves.

More importantly for the norm-based narrative of the ES, the human-targeted measures proposed by the OSCE

provoked a counter-discourse in which they were portrayed as supporting separatism and therefore challenging Kyrgyz sovereignty. As a result, they were equally unable to implement effective conflict mitigation measures because of fears that their presence would undermine the sovereignty of the Kyrgyz state (Lewis 2013: 12-13).

Conversely, the SCO, deeming that none of the ‘Three Evils’ present on its agenda (terrorism, extremism and separatism) was in play in the events, saw no ground for implementing security measures other than diplomatic support to Ms. Otunbayeva and dispatch of limited humanitarian aid. The same thing may be said for the CSTO, whose charter emphasises respect for the sovereignty of member states and pledges respect for the principle of non-intervention (Bordyuzha undated; CSTO 2002). Despite Kyrgyzstan’s direct appeal to Russia, the legal basis, the norm-imbued environment did not foresee the possibility of intervention.

Also, while Anna Matveeva argues that the Treaty of Eternal Friendship signed by the two parties could have provided a legal basis for a solidarist intervention (2011: 9), in fact the treaty states that the parties

will develop [their] relations on the basis of large-scale cooperation, mutual trust, mutual support by providing versatile in preventing threats to independence, national sovereignty and territorial integrity, the principles of equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of each other (Deklaratsiya 2000).

The Osh riots were considered neither as threats to the territorial integrity of Kyrgyzstan, nor as acts of terrorism. The security mechanisms provided by the treaties binding the two, therefore, could not be activated.

Therefore, from an ES perspective, it can be said that in Central Asia during the Osh events there were two competing discourses of security, one related to a solidarist international society framework and one related to a pluralist one (Bellamy and Macdonald 2004: 313; Kreikemeyer 2013).

The former may be defined as entailing a shift from the state to the individual as the referent of security; as defining insecurity largely as a threat to the quality of life of individuals; as requiring the active agency of non-state actors; as orienting security ‘away from the traditional and, more importantly, exclusive concern with armed conflict and the preservation of the state and international society’ (Bellamy and Macdonald 2004: 319).

The latter is defined as purchasing security sometimes also at the expense of individuals; as prescribing that boundaries of the state and the community do not necessarily overlap (what Karimov had clearly in mind); as a set of rules and security practices that, although succeeding ‘in reducing premature deaths caused by inter-

state war', has nonetheless failed 'to curb the increase in premature deaths caused by internal war, poverty and state repression' (Bellamy and Macdonald 2004: 315).

In the end, the two different security logics in play in Osh were reflective of the pluralist and solidarist conceptions of (regional) international society: order vs. justice. As we have seen, the pluralist, prudential logic had the upper hand. The *raison d'état*, or better, the *raison de système*, was deemed to be more important than the *raison d'humanité*. A strongly systemic, state-centric set of norms outplayed another set more concerned with individuals and human security.

While this prevailing logic may be condemnable from a liberal, human-centred perspective, it cannot be accused of lacking normative content *tout-court*. The referent object, the recipient (and the beneficiary) of the norms were the region and the states comprising the region, not its inhabitants (Axyonova 2013). Irrespective of whether we accept it or not, a *societal* dimension, a common concern, a sense of an endangered 'we-ness' was present during the Osh events. This tells us that an international society logic was indeed present at that time, and sustained itself with the specific pluralist norms and rules identified and discussed above.

Last but not least, it is also interesting to see how, in line with the development of secondary institutions present at the regional level analysed above (from CAU to CAEC to CACO until their complete disappearance), the regional environment in Central Asia has been moving from a 'dead-letter' solidarism in the 1990s to a paramount, almost idealtypical, anarchic pluralism. *Ceteris paribus*, this movement along the spectrum is observable also in the two different reactions to the civil war in Tajikistan and the Osh events. Although very different in nature and duration, the two events were framed and managed in different normative contexts and on different normative bases, as well as different conceptions of sovereignty.

Before concluding this section, it is interesting also to notice how from an ES perspective, the Osh events present also a conundrum as far as the institution of GPM is concerned. It was noted in the previous chapter that GPM was a powerful institution in the 1990s in the region, fully respected by all Central Asian states. The war in Afghanistan in the early 2000s demonstrated once again the commitment of Central Asian states to this institution *internationally*.

However, it seems that *in the region* there is a particular understanding of GPM, and not even shared by all states in the same way: in Central Asia, GPM seems to be legitimate only when problems do not concern bilateral or regional political

relations between states. The Afghan conflict, the Aral Sea management, climatic issues and broader security-related problems are well framed within a GPM logic. Yet, when conflict arises between two states affecting the status of their relations, Great Powers are not called upon or invoked. Instead, the issue almost comes within a new rubric of 'Central Asian regional sovereignty'. Indeed, Great Powers are seen as potential 'spoilers' of the conflict, ready to take advantage of it. According to Rustam Burnashev,

Great Power Management as an institution is accepted [in Central Asia], but only with respect to external situation. No one would accept interference in domestic affairs! When Karimov says "terrorism is a problem" he really wants help from the international community, but for when it is not in Uzbekistan. In Batken, for example, he invoked international support. It's a question between internal and external legitimacy.²⁰⁸

References from all states to 'third parties' fomenting the conflict, to some extent, conform to this argument. If we assume that GPM and the hegemony that derives from it involve 'the product of legitimacy, of the perception, on the part of other social actors, that the exercise of power is rightful' (Clark 2009: 204; see also Reus-Smit 2005: 88), and that 'Great powers can fulfil their managerial functions only if those functions are accepted clearly enough by a large enough proportion of the society of states to command legitimacy' (Bull, 1977: 228), in the Osh events the absence of such legitimacy was evident in how neither Kazakhstan, nor Uzbekistan, nor Tajikistan appealed to Russia to intervene, leaving Kyrgyzstan the only state to do so. Conforming to the normative logic in play in the region, Russia decided to not intervene.

Yet, I showed how Russia, while not directly intervening in the conflict, played a diplomatic role in managing the transition from Bakiyev to Otunbayeva and, in addition, it is also believed that it interfered in the earlier phases of the conflict, when Bakiyev was deposed. In addition, rumours about Russia's role in Bakiyev's ousting and Russia's manoeuvres behind the scenes take us back to the notion of hegemony discussed in Chapter 3. This interference of Russia in the region refers to recent research on 'conspiracy theories' linked to Russia's hegemonic role in the region (for an overall discussion, see Heathershaw 2011).

²⁰⁸ Interview.

As a matter of fact, after Bakiyev negotiated a renewal deal with the US on the Manas airbase despite assurances to Moscow that the base would be closed, Russia reacted ‘with undisguised fury’ (Blank 2010). The Russian government suspended the funding of hydroelectric projects in Kyrgyzstan, it raised the price for gas, and ‘upbraided the then Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov for spending money on projects other than what they had been intended for’ (Blank 2010), involving China in hydroelectric deals. As reported by the Washington Post, in late March, two weeks before the April 7 protests, ‘Russia’s Kremlin-friendly television stations and newspapers marked the fifth anniversary of Bakiyev’s rise to power in the putsch known as the Tulip Revolution with unusually tough stories about his rule. One paper compared him to Genghis Khan, and Russia’s top television station hammered him with multiple reports alleging corruption.’

Then, after the opposition announced plans for nationwide protests, Putin ‘provided a final spark by signing a decree on March 29 eliminating subsidies on gasoline exports to Kyrgyzstan and other former Soviet republics that had not joined a new customs union’ (Washington Post 2010) and shut down some bilateral banking transactions, triggering social unrest. ‘Once the fighting stopped and it became clear that Roza Otunbaeva’s provisional government was at least partially in charge, Russia backed her quickly with 1.5 million tonnes of Russian grain, an agreement on \$50 million of financial aid, and a tantalizing (if ultimately empty) promise of security assistance’ (Nixey 2012: 9). This shows how, by apparently ‘staying out’ to respect a regional norm, Moscow was actively playing a role in the conflict.

By looking at these events, one may argue that Russia’s hegemonic presence is still observable, albeit indirectly, in discourses of ‘foreign interference’ or foreign threat’, which have been highlighted in the course of the chapter. As John Heathershaw has recently noted, conspiracy theories and ‘concepts such as [...] ‘foreign interference’ [...] reproduce a Central Asian politics in which patron-client linkages to Russia are interpreted not simply as business relations, but as evidence of the hegemonic position and conspiratorial role of Russia in Central Asia.’ (Heathershaw 2011: 628).

Was this behaviour an example of hegemony in the region, then? Here, I argue, the question of legitimacy comes to the fore. Russia, as discussed in Chapter 3, seems to rely much more on primacy than on legitimate hegemony. These intrusions and interferences, based on direct linkages to ruling elites in Central Asia rather than

on institutionalised behaviour, contribute to heightening tensions between Central Asian states, thus preventing the regional international society to develop along more solid lines. As James Nixey has astutely argued, Russia has genuine security interests in Central Asia, but ‘it would be more convincing if it did not play the security card when no such threat exists’ (2012: 8).

This, again, seems to conflate hegemony and primacy. Russia, thanks to its financial, political and military means, is indeed able to penetrate the regional space, to create distrust among leaders, to weaken existing regimes and to affect the course of regional politics. Yet, this kind of intervention is not yet considered legitimate regionally, and reflects a more coercive way to manage relations with regional actors rather than an attempt to ‘working towards rules formation and legitimation’ (Kaczmarek 2014: 98). Nonetheless, these discourses are constitutive and performative, a mode of making reality, and point to the particular role of Russia in the region. More on this, as anticipated, will be said in the conclusions of the thesis (Chapter 7.4).

Although more on this will be said at the end of this chapter and in the conclusions of this thesis, it is also important to note that the particular understanding of GPM in the region has also implications for how other institutions, namely international law and diplomacy, work in the regional context. This is clearly visible in problems related to water-management and water courses, to which we turn now.

5.5 The Rogun Dam

The second area in which an ES account of Central Asian regional politics reveals more than a usual neo-realist framework of analysis is that of water-management, in particular with respect to the construction of the Rogun dam in Tajikistan. As in the section above on the Osh events, this section is made up of a first subsection where I illustrate the basic controversy and a second, longer subsection where I try to identify the norms and institutions at play in its dealing.

5.5.1 The controversy

Water management in Central Asia has been, since 1991, a problem concerning all regional states (Sievers 2001; Bernauer and Siegfried 2008; Rakhmatullaev, Huneau et al. 2010; Bichsel 2011; Abdullaev and Atabaeva 2012). As noted in chapter 4, during the Soviet times there was a centralised (read: Moscow-regulated) system of

water distribution, which made possible exchanges of water and energy between those Central Asian states endowed with water resources (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and those that were endowed with energy resources (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).

Once independent, regional states constantly strove to find mechanisms to regulate water flows from the Amur Darya and Syrdarya basins in the summer in exchange for energy in winter, but all of them failed due to a basic lack of political will and trust between the leaders. In recent times, the already difficult relations between states in the region have been aggravated by the decision of the Tajik government to build a new dam, Rogun, on the Vakhsh River.²⁰⁹

According to the Tajik government, the construction of the dam is of utmost necessity, given persistent shortages of energy in winter times. With the construction of the dam, Tajikistan would solve its problems of energy-dependence on what it considers as an unreliable neighbour, Uzbekistan, and would allow it to be self-sufficient in the creation of hydro-electric power in the longer term.

The Tajik government considers the construction of Rogun as a matter of national interest. In this assessment of the necessity of the construction of dams for the need of energy auto-sufficiency, Tajikistan is supported by Kyrgyzstan (Avesta 2013b), which experiences the same problems and has indeed started a similar project (although much smaller in scale), Kambarata-1.

The position of the three downstream countries is different. Water is considered as a (regional) public good, and therefore its flow cannot be hindered by national architectural projects that do not favour the collective usage of it. In addition, downstream countries contest the fact that, while Tajikistan could spare energy by building smaller dams and small hydroelectric power stations, Rogun would be the highest dam in the world (World Bank 2014b).

Yet, while the three downstream countries have repeatedly voiced their opposition to the Rogun project invoking regional consultations and calling for the respect of the interest of all countries in the region, Tajikistan has started the construction of the dam. Therefore, the problem illustrated seems a typical realist,

209 Technically speaking, the project is not 'new'. The Rogun dam was planned already in Soviet times, and its construction started back in 1976. The project was interrupted when the Soviet Union collapsed and then resumed in 2010, when the Tajik government launched an IPO to aim at finishing construction of the project.

confrontational example of international politics. Two clashing interests, no resolution, no compromise, no agreement: zero-sum politics. According to some analysts, conflict will be inevitable (Mambetov 2012; Blank 2012; Shlapentokh 2012a; Shlapentokh 2012b).

But is the stalemate managed in a fully confrontational way, or are some mechanisms, some practices, some institutions followed, thus taming a violent outbreak? I argue that an ES analysis of this so far ‘cold’ conflict reveals that Central Asian states are well-aware of the risks of a confrontation on Rogun, and that despite the bitter disagreement which exists between the states, certain norms and codified behaviours are still observed by all parties.

5.5.2 Taming an inevitable conflict?

Clearly, the positions of upstream and downstream countries differ. Downstream countries make reference to customary international water law and UN Conventions, while upstream countries make reference to the Harmon doctrine, insisting on the sovereign rights on natural resources which a state is endowed with.

An additional problem for downstream countries, however, is that not all the states are signatory parties to such conventions. They make reference to them, but because upstream countries have not signed them, technically they are not bound by them (see below for a more detailed analysis).

Yet, the fact that they still refer to them is important for ES theory, because it identifies a precept, a script, an institution that in the mind of the actors should be followed. That is, references to international law shed light on a framework of ‘appropriateness’, of what is permissible and accepted by a social group, a standard of reference that is to be upheld if members of such group are to live in an orderly and predictable way (Jackson 2000).

There is also the role of diplomacy to be considered. This, as usual, is made up of official state visits in regional, neighbouring countries and at summits and more technical meetings. In the region the institutionalisation of the ‘Riparian Meetings’ is observable, also called ‘Information-sharing and Discussion Meetings on the Assessment Studies’ under the aegis of the WB. The institutionalisation of such meetings are a continuation of the consultations that the WB facilitated with the

riparian countries before the first formal meeting in 2011.²¹⁰ Governments from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and also Afghanistan participated in consultations in 2008-2009 on the Terms of Reference for the Assessment Studies.

The purpose of the meetings is twofold: to provide information to the riparian countries about the current status of the Assessment Studies and the work program, and to review the draft inception reports on the two studies; and to seek feedback and input from the participants on the program of information sharing and discussions with governments and civil society organizations in the region. Each meeting is conducted with the participation of representatives of governments of all riparian countries (the Uzbek government did not take part in the first meeting in 2011 and in the fourth meeting in 2013), and with representatives of civil societies and communities from all riparian countries as well.

The crucial thing to note with respect to these institutionalised meetings is that they were first established *at the request of Central Asian governments themselves*. It was they who, conscious of the sensitivity of the issue at stake, decided by common agreement to create some sort of ‘routinised discussion’ on the dam project with the WB at key points during the study process (World Bank 2014a).

Importantly, in the last meeting held in Almaty from 14 to 18 July 2014, discussing the draft Techno-Economic Assessment Study (TEAS) Phase 2 Summary report and the draft Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) Report not only were all five Central Asian countries plus Afghanistan represented physically by official members of governments, but they also jointly discussed possible measures to coordinate dialogue, ameliorate the project and propose feasible alternatives. In addition, they also unanimously agreed to have another meeting to discuss the possible alternatives and to compare their stances (Akipress 2014c; KazInform 2014).

There is also another aspect to consider. In fact, the WB Assessment study, which *mutatis mutandis* can be seen as a form of international mediation, is the result of an agreement specifically between the Uzbek and the Tajik governments. The request for an independent examination came from the Uzbek side already in 2008, when in a letter dated 3 February the Uzbek government asked the then Prime

210 The first meeting was conducted on May 17-19, 2011; the second on November 7, 2012; the third on February 12, 2013; the fourth on October 17, 18, and 20, 2013, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan; and the fifth on July 14-18, 2014.

Minister of Tajikistan Aqil Aqilov to consider the issue of undertaking a mandatory international independent competent appraisal of the project of constructing this hydropower facility (Uzbekistan.be undated).

On 10 March 2010, after a series of consultations, ‘the WB regional director for Central Asia, Motu Konishi, announced in Dushanbe that the bank had found funding to carry out a feasibility study and environmental assessment’ of the Rogun project, following a request by Tajikistan, which was pressed by Uzbekistan for an independent international assessment (Sodiqov 2010).

The agreement was then discussed by Rahmon and Karimov in person in June 2010 in the context of an official SCO meeting in Tashkent. Karimov made clear that freight cargoes would be released to Tajikistan, on condition that they did not contain material to be used for the construction of the dam, while Rahmon renewed his commitment to adopt an independent assessment study of the feasibility of the project before starting the construction. In addition, both parties agreed to continue contacts in order to ensure the openness and transparency of the whole process, also in concert with other states (Asia Plus 2010).

Of the countries opposed to the construction of the dam, Uzbekistan has been certainly the most vociferous. Due to its economy being primarily based on cotton crops and agriculture, a reduction of water-flow from Tajikistan could severely hamper its economic potential and development.

Uzbekistan’s first reactions to the construction of Rogun resembled a power-political functioning international society. Despite several justifications and references to technical and engineering problems (UzEmbassy 2011), Uzbekistan has been accused of derailing, blocking, delaying and hindering transit cargoes to Tajikistan containing materials to be used for the construction of the dam and, more in general, to sustain the already crippled Tajik economy.²¹¹

Nonetheless, the position of Uzbekistan over the years has been converging towards more diplomatic practices, aimed at containing potential conflict and looking for a common solution shared by all riparian countries.

Between September and October 2012, the Uzbek President Islam Karimov visited both Astana and Ashgabat to discuss a common position of downstream

211 See, for example, Right Vision News, 16 March 2011; IHS Global Insight, 31 March 2011. For a rebuttal to these allegations, see the letter sent by the Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to his Tajik counterpart, Prime Minister Aqil Aqilov (UzDaily 2012).

countries with respect to the construction of both Rogun in Tajikistan and Kambaratashavk in Kyrgyzstan. Common positions have been found both with Nazarbayev and Berdymukhamedov,²¹² stressing repeatedly the need to observe customary environmental international law, that is, equitable and reasonable use of water resources and due-diligence obligation not to cause significant harm to neighbouring riparian countries.²¹³

The agreement with Nazarbayev was actually a continuation of a common diplomatic position held already in March 2010 in Tashkent, when the Kazakh President argued that both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan ‘stand for an international examination of water and energy facilities, including Rogun and Kambarata for the security of [their] peoples’. On that occasion, Nazarbayev also spoke with Rahmon of Tajikistan and Bakiyev of Kyrgyzstan, trying to convince them of the necessity of an independent assessment on their hydroelectric projects, and they agreed as then demonstrated by the involvement of the WB in the process.²¹⁴

Consultations were therefore at play, demonstrating a common willingness to find a mutually agreeable solution for this very delicate matter. Unilateral actions were already leaving space to more concerted, diplomatic and restrained attitudes, exactly with the aim of preserving the region’s stability and order. Prevention of conflict became paramount. Just a few months after saying that war could occur in the region because of water resources, Karimov stated the following: ‘I would like to say that peace should be in the region. Mutual respect should be in the region. We have lived together with the Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, and Kazakh peoples in the region in harmony for thousands of years. Nothing can separate us from each other’.²¹⁵

To be sure, this slow institutionalisation of dialogue and self-restraint has not played down disagreements and strong opposition from the riparian countries. Examples of this are several protests against the Rogun dam voiced in international arenas by Uzbek diplomats (Akipress 2012b; Avesta 2013d), as well as (milder) protests from Kazakhs and Turkmen. Nonetheless, as stated repeatedly both in the

212 ITAR-TASS, 7 September 2012; IWPR (2012).

213 While this is not a thesis about environmental international law, it is important to stress that these customary norms have been included in the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Helsinki, 17 March 1992), entered into force on 6 October, 1996. Uzbekistan (4 September 2007), Kazakhstan (11 January 2001) and Turkmenistan (29 August 2012) all acceded the treaty.

214 This fact has been confirmed to me also by Bulat Auelbaev in the course of our interview.

215 Times of Central Asia, 1 February 2013.

literature and in this thesis, the ES does not advocate a fully cooperative picture of international relations, but in fact emphasises the constant presence of the two aspects of international practice, cooperation and conflict. As Robert Jackson maintains,

It is obvious that international relations can be conducted with little regard, if any, for the rule of law and occasionally even without much prudence. Nor am I saying that these modalities exhaust the normative basis of international society, which clearly is not the case. I am only saying that it makes sense to include both of them in our international theories because the practical world of international relations includes both of them as basic references for justifying foreign policies and other international activities. These are two interconnected and mutually communicative ways of engaging in international relations and thus of theorising those same relations (2000: 122).

Yet, there are still two important things to note. The first one is that despite the several hindrances at the border with respect to freight traffic and cross-border communications, Uzbekistan has over the years abandoned those practices in favour of a more diplomatic and concerted way of containing the problem.

At the moment of writing, the traffic on the Uzbek-Tajik borders, is not only smooth, but even appears to be on the rise. According to Usmon Qalandarov, deputy head of Tajik Railways, ‘the incumbent management of Tajik Railways does not have any problems with Uzbek authorities and Tajik trains now pass through Uzbek territory without difficulty. All arising issues are solved by one phone call.’ Moreover, Tajik and Uzbek railway authorities have agreed to cut tariffs for transit transportation (Asia Plus 2014b). In the same way, also the two other downstream countries have tried to exercise self-restraint and did not engage in hostile practices against Tajikistan, but actually engaged it in a deeper form of bilateral cooperation.

Also with respect to Kyrgyzstan and the construction of Kambarata, conciliatory gestures have been recently made, and the situation looks now far less conflict-prone than the one with Tajikistan. For example, Turkmenistan has not only engaged in forms of cooperation with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Akipress 2012a) but through the adoption of a new Code on Water based on its neighbours’ legislation seeks to contribute to deepening cooperation between the Central Asian states through the harmonisation of relevant legislation (Akipress 2014b).

At this point, it may be interesting and worthwhile to analyse how the Rogun case is being managed in Central Asia from an institutional perspective, that is, what

practices and norms are being used. This is indeed the focus of the whole thesis. This part, of course, will draw on what analysed above.

First of all, we may consider the role that sovereignty plays here. It is indeed paramount, although perhaps a little opaque. The calls for consultations, approval and consideration of downstream countries before engaging in the construction of HPP and dams voiced by Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan point to how sovereignty equality and sovereign rights are inherently adopted in Central Asia.

Paradoxically, the positions of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are based on considerations of sovereignty as well, as they claim it is their sovereign right to build such facilities on their territories to overcome energy shortages. Indeed, the legal position of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (and here is observable the tight nexus between international law and sovereignty), that of the rightfulness of considering water as a sovereign commodity, is known in general international law as the 'Harmon Doctrine', or 'doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of the upstream state'.

This doctrine, which as we shall see below does not find legitimacy in the body of international law, is visible in the following words of Aqil Aqilov, Tajikistan's Prime Minister, uttered in 2012: 'All questions of the environment, the water balance and the threat of man-made catastrophes are fully taken into account by Tajikistan. The construction of such sites [such as Rogun] is a sovereign right of any country provided by international laws' (Tajikwater undated).

Kyrgyzstan also has adhered to this view. Bazarbai Mambetov, an expert on energy and water issues and former deputy Kyrgyz Prime Minister, claimed that 'in as much as the water resources originate on the territory of Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyzstan can also declare its sovereign rights on water resources' (Pannier 2009).

The whole debate on water-management and water issues, in fact, may be framed in the international law/sovereignty discourse of 'limited sovereignty' doctrine and equal share distribution between watercourse states, according to which each state has the right to a fair and reasonable share of the productive use of international waters within its territory (Chotaev 2013).

In the light of this, we can analyse what the role played by international law in this (series of) dispute(s) is. Clearly, references to international law here are abundant. We have seen how in particular the downstream countries are keen on advocating international customary norms on water management in fighting the upstream ones. This shows that Central Asian states are, insofar as conventions and customary law

are concerned *and concern them*, acquainted with the instruments of international law.

Within the region, in the field of water management, there is actually a perfectly functioning international agreement between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on use of waters in the Talas and Chu rivers. This document regulates responsibilities of two neighbouring states in the use of transnational water flows. For example, Kazakhstan agreed to contribute to the exploitation expenses of the distribution process in Kyrgyzstan and Bishkek granted to Astana the specific regime for water intake and release.²¹⁶ The bilateral agreement is working smoothly and without creating hindrances, and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan even submitted letters of endorsement for the project, 'Enabling transboundary cooperation and Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) in the Chu Talas river basin' at the sixth meeting of the parties to the convention on the protection and use of transboundary watercourses and international lakes water convention, held from 28-30 November 2012 in Rome (IISD 2012).

In the same meeting, other positive signs that international law instruments are being adopted by Central Asian countries were visible. Turkmenistan, by words of Ahmet Muhammedov, Deputy Minister of Water Economy, recognized the Convention's role in improving water management in of Central Asia. He said Turkmenistan was committed to IWRM and looked forward to close cooperation with all parties. In addition, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan all highlighted the role played by National Policy Dialogues (NPDs)²¹⁷ on improving water legislation and water resources management principles, saying that NPDs have become a traditional mechanism for discussing and addressing water issues.

Moreover, Uzbekistan encouraged all other states not parties to the Convention, including therefore Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to join it to simplify legal processes and cooperation mechanisms, and suggested even a Central Asian representative for the Implementation Committee. One month before, during his visit to Ashgabat, Islam Karimov welcomed Turkmenistan's joining the UN Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes,

²¹⁶ Ibidem.

²¹⁷ NPDs are based on consultations with relevant ministries, agencies and institutions (including science and academia), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), parliamentary bodies and other national and international organizations. The dialogue process is usually conducted under the leadership of a high-level Government representative, such as the Minister/Deputy Minister of Environment or the Chairman of the State Water Committee.

saying that this would have strengthened their coordination and legal position on water-management issues (Trend 2012b).

Yet, as in the 1990s, there seems to be an imperfect use of international law, or at least one that does not fully match with established international practice. To begin with, downstream countries have often voiced their ‘historical rights’ of preferable use of watercourse, claiming that such rights, having indeed historical meaning, should not be altered by new constructions affecting the rivers’ course. However, this practice does not find confirmation and/or legitimacy at the international level and in international practice.

Secondly, the already quoted Harmon Doctrine does not find support in international practice either. There is still a rather shallow understanding of how international legal norms, if properly internalised and localised, could help regional states smooth their differences. In the words of Shairbek Juraev,

on water issues again there is international law but Uzbekistan has its own conventions and Tajikistan has its own conventions...so, Central Asia remains an area where international law, as every law actually, remains very new...the internalisation of the formal law is still not there, we still have our own customs, our habits.²¹⁸

Thirdly, as noticed, there is a disparity in membership to the several conventions regulating transboundary waters, and therefore while some parties are guided by the provisions of the treaty, others (notably, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) are guided (only) by customary international law. While there are indeed ongoing discussions in the region on whether to join multilateral conventions on water law (see below), Central Asian states are very cautious in adopting conventions that may limit their economic development and national interests, and may scrutinise international treaties for years.²¹⁹

Fourthly, there is the almost total reluctance of Central Asian states to defer the controversy to an arbitration court, most likely the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or an *ad hoc* organism. For example, Article 33 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses foresees the deferral of the contentious issue to a party acting as mediator, *bona officia* provider or, ultimately, to the ICJ. The same does Article 22.2 of the Convention on the Protection

²¹⁸ Interview.

²¹⁹ Interview with Official Uzbek source.

and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, to which Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are parties.

Interestingly, while all the five Central Asian states are entitled, *qua* members of the UN, to apply to and appear before the ICJ (Article 93, paragraph 1 of the Court's Statute), none of them has yet recognised its jurisdiction as *compulsory*. This has severe implications, since the Court can only deal with a dispute when the States concerned have recognized its jurisdiction. No State can therefore be a party to proceedings before the Court unless it has in some manner or other consented thereto.²²⁰

The WB in fact acts as a technical mediator, and does not enter into the legal or political nature of the dispute (but on the political side neither could do the ICJ). Tajikistan once appealed to Russia for mediation (Akipress 2014a), but downstream countries have categorically denied this possibility. In fact, there is a general request from downstream countries (and Kyrgyzstan as well) to solve the problem internally, within the region, without interference of third parties that could handle the dispute in their own favour.

As in the case with the Osh conflict in 2010, and the Tajik conflict in the early 1990s, appeal to international organisations and most notably the UN seem to be the only form of external 'interference' or 'mediation', accepted as legitimate by all the states of the region. This is evident in the words of the Uzbek Foreign Ministry's statement released on 14 April 2009,²²¹ stressing how 'third countries' interference in Central Asia's water and energy problems is inadmissible', but then adding that there was a 'need to carry out an international examination of all hydro-energy projects on trans-border rivers without fail, under UN aegis'. Islam Karimov's words are perhaps even more instructive:

No one will tell that it is a subversive act but say it is an aid. It means acting as a mediator. Do you know where a mediator is needed? He is needed at a bazaar to go between traders. But in the

220 'Contentious jurisdiction', <http://www.icj-cij.org/jurisdiction/index.php?p1=5&p2=1>, accessed on 17 July 2014; 'States entitled to appear before the Court', <http://www.icj-cij.org/jurisdiction/index.php?p1=5&p2=1&p3=1&sp3=a>, accessed on 17 July 2014; 'Declarations recognizing the jurisdiction of the Court as compulsory', <http://www.icj-cij.org/jurisdiction/index.php?p1=5&p2=1&p3=3>, accessed on 17 July 2014.

221 'Central Asia draws water battle lines'.

politics do you know what a mediator does? He pursues his own interests.²²²

This particular understanding of arbitration/mediation has also hindered what could be called ‘regional’ mediation, that is, mediation exercised by a regional state. Kazakhstan, by virtue of Nazarbayev’s well-established international position and consideration within the region as one of the wisest and oldest presidents, has assumed more conciliatory tones with upstream countries, and has tried consistently to conciliate the contesting parties, especially Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, in particular through meetings and summits. Nazarbayev also acts as an informal mediator in the various meetings of the IFAS, and when discussing water issues with Uzbekistan, reportedly consults also with his Kyrgyz and Tajik counterparts.²²³

Furthermore, already in 2009, Miroslav Jenca, Director of the Ashgabat-based UNRCCA, told diplomatic representatives that he hoped Kazakhstan could play a leadership role at the upcoming conference. He noted that President Nazarbayev played a key role in pressing for water and energy cooperation in 2008 and bringing the Central Asian leaders together at an October summit in Almaty to discuss these issues.

He also noted that downstream Kazakhstan’s position on water issues is very ‘moderate’ in comparison to that of downstream Uzbekistan. The very fact that the WB meetings with official representatives from all riparian countries are held in Almaty can be seen as an indirect effect of Kazakhstan’s attempts to find the most diplomatic solution possible to the problem. Indeed, Jenca’s office chose Almaty as the venue because of support from Kazakhstan Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin, Kazakhstan’s moderate position as a peace-maker on these issues, and its convenient location (Wikileaks 2009).

Yet, Nazarbayev cannot be effectively considered as a mediator recognised, ‘institutionalised’ by the parties involved (not last because Kazakhstan itself is part of the controversy), and has so far failed to bring at the same table Karimov and Rahmon, or to convene a high-level meeting with all the countries.

In fact, Kazakhstan’s official position itself is against outside mediation and even participation to water projects in the region. Nazarbayev has made this clear when speaking both with Karimov in Tashkent in June 2013, saying that

222 Times of Central Asia, 1 February 2013.

223 Interview with Bulat Auelbaev.

a great deal depends for our future on how [Central Asian states] cooperate and trust each other and together resolve our questions without hindering other states. [...] And we want to send a friendly message to our neighbours that we ourselves have to resolve these questions (Lillis 2013),

and with the Kyrgyz president Almazbek Atambayev in Bishkek, arguing that ‘There is a need for an open dialog on water issues in the region. Nobody will solve the problems for us. We have to come to a consensus ourselves’ (Tengri News 2013). For Kazakhstan, ‘water resources can not be managed by investors. If the main shareholders would be the investors, they would be managing water resources in the way they want. So they don’t want foreigners managing water.’²²⁴

In a more recent email interview with a prominent local expert on the matter, I was also told that ‘although, strictly speaking, Kazakhstan is not a riparian party to the Amudarya river basin, any developments on the Amudarya will affect it also. This is due to close interconnectedness and interdependency of water and energy networks in the Aral Sea basin as a whole. Because of its own interests at stake, I don’t see Kazakhstan serving as a neutral mediator on this issue.’²²⁵ In the words of Rustam Burnashev,

In this region, countries do not want to give power to other (regional) countries. Kazakhstan could mediate even more effectively on Rogun, but this would not be accepted. Also because Kazakhstan has interests. [...] A mediator can be an international body, you know, the WB, or the UN, although imperfect, but not a country, especially a neighbour.²²⁶

Ashgabat has not been successful either, despite the *bona officia* played in the 1990s in resolving both the Tajik conflict and inter-state quarrels between Central Asian presidents. This (non-) practice of mediation and arbitration is inherently linked, I argue, with the interpretation of the GPM institutions discussed above with respect to the Osh events: insofar as help is aimed at facing international challenges such as transnational crime, terrorism or climate change, then for Central Asian states GPM is indeed a paramount legitimate institution.

However, when problems arise between states in the region, considerations of a ‘sovereign Central Asian’ space and sovereign prerogatives act as a shield against

224 Interview with Bulat Auelbaev.

225 Email interview with local expert on the matter, from London, UK, July 24, 2014.

226 Interview with Rustam Burnashev.

interference even if, understandably, smaller states such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are keener to seek the support of Russia in dealing with their more powerful neighbours. Another good indication of this is given by Payam Foroughi from the OSCE Academy in Bishkek:

They [Central Asian states] don't go to the ICJ over Rogun because both of them know they could be wrong...Tajikistan went to a legal court in London, not the international one, on this TALCO issue...against this company in Russia...but they lost all cases! [...] So I believe both countries realise they could be wrong, they are not ready...but there is also this sovereignty understanding of these states...it's like "we are in charge!"...why should we have an intruder? [...] Central Asians do not have that kind of experience.²²⁷

Before concluding this digression on international law in Central Asia, however, it should be noted that international legal uniformity in water management, even if difficult and thorny, is an *aspiration* in Central Asia (Wilson 2009), not *utopia*.

With reference to water-management, for example, small, multilateral commissions are starting operating in the region working on the legal harmonisation between the limited agreements reached in the region and international law.²²⁸

Furthermore, we have seen already that Uzbekistan has welcomed Turkmenistan's accession to the UN 1992 Convention, and has encouraged Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to do the same. In addition, the joining of the UN 1997 Convention is still an option on the table for the whole regional countries, given that Uzbekistan is the only country that has already joined it.

Curiously, during the Convention's adoption by the UNGA in 1997, none of the Central Asian nations voted against it. While Kazakhstan voted in favour and Uzbekistan abstained from the vote, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan were absent from the voting process.

Kazakhstan is the most likely candidate to join the convention soon, especially since it has already committed to all water-related UNECE Conventions and that it shares with Uzbekistan a normative convergence on these issues.

Turkmenistan is another downstream country considering joining the UN Convention. An official representative of that country stated at a 2011 international

²²⁷ Interview with Payam Foroughi, OSCE Academy, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, November 30, 2013.

²²⁸ Interview with Kazakh expert 1, November 13, 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

water conference in Tashkent that preparatory procedures to join the Convention were under way (Ziganshina 2011; Ziganshina 2014).

The head of the Kyrgyz delegation to the same conference stated that his country may consider joining the Protocol on Water and Health under UNECE Water Convention as a first step.

Very interesting is the case of Tajikistan. Tajikistan's existing legal commitments could facilitate its joining the Convention. For example, under the 1998 CIS Agreement on Transboundary Waters, Tajikistan agreed to take into account the provisions of the 1966 Helsinki Rules, on which the UN Convention is largely based, and of the UNECE Water Convention.

In addition, on 17 February 2004, Tajikistan promulgated Decree of 1287 on Accession to the Espoo Convention. However, the Depositary of the Convention has not yet received the ratification documents.²²⁹ If Tajikistan completes the ratification process for the Espoo Convention, it will be a party to another instrument largely aligned with the procedural norms of international water law.²³⁰

The institution that perhaps has played so far the most prominent role in dealing with the arising water conflict is, like in the 1990s, diplomacy, with its derivative of summitry. How and where do we see diplomacy operating in the Rogun case? According to my findings, my answer is 'in several cases', and I say so after empirically investigating the words and practices of state representatives, meant as 'craftsmen' of politics (Jackson 2000), as well as interviewing them.

Was not, even if harsh and heated, the exchange of letter between the Uzbek and Tajik Prime Ministers a diplomatic exchange using the diplomatic instrument of the letter to defend their own positions? Are not, even if categorically hostile, speeches at the UN a diplomatic practice aimed at making the international community more aware of the problem and therefore raising the bar for a possible conflict? Are not summits institutionalised in Almaty, thanks to the WB, an instrument accepted by all Central Asian governments to multilaterally find non-violent solutions to the problem, taking the interest of all countries into considerations?

229 Ibidem.

230 The Espoo (EIA) Convention sets out the obligations of Parties to assess the environmental impact of certain activities at an early stage of planning. It also lays down the general obligation of States to notify and consult each other on all major projects under consideration that are likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact across boundaries. This Convention would be clearly an appropriate legal for the management of the Rogun case (UNECE undated).

And we should avoid labelling such meetings as ‘talking shops’. Even if big decisions or agreements are not taken, such summits have the function of diffusing tensions, of allowing the parties to present their stances, of having the possibility to discuss. In the course of an interview with Uzbek officials, I was told that ‘it is exactly thanks to diplomacy that Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are still able to avoid conflict, in particular inter-agency ones. These contacts are behind closed doors, though, because of the fragility of the situation’.²³¹ The same point was made by a Central Asian representative of the UNRCCA, with specific reference to agreements reached by all regional states on early-warning mechanisms and data-collection procedures in the field of water-management.

We should remember that, in conflictual regions such as Central Asia, ‘talking shops do provide important pre-planned opportunities for communication and negotiation (side chats among foreign ministers) that can alleviate friction and contribute to confidence-building’ (Khong 2014: 163).

In the words of a local expert, who preferred to remain anonymous,

there are various interactions between the countries in search for solutions. This process is not smooth and easy – and it cannot be with such a complicated and fundamental matter for all countries of the region. [...] Diplomacy to foster mutual understanding does not work very well, but at least they manage to maintain peace.²³²

The several bilateral meetings held on water-management resemble a strange form of ‘multilateral bilateralism’, here defined as a diplomatic practice of a community of states (or an international society) through which problems concerning all parties are treated in a series of bilateral meetings between the parties rather than in a (shorter) series of meeting with all parties present at the table.²³³ These meetings, so far, had the effect of diffusing tensions and keep the regional system manageable with respect to water issues.

Even if behind closed doors and therefore not directly accessible to the public, fruitful

231 Interview with two representatives of the Institute for Strategic and Regional studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Tashkent.

232 Email interview with local expert on the matter.

233 This, to me, is a particular institutional arrangement (derivative of diplomacy) that takes place when a dynamic of strong rivalry exist between the parties at the systemic level, such that a multilateral solution is unlikely to yield results but not such to prevent possible meeting of minds at the bilateral level. The sum of the positive results of the bilateral meetings, even if not included in a single framework of cooperation, then ameliorate the general, systemic environment.

negotiations on water-quota allocations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan take place regularly. As two interviewees put it,

Western perceptions are wrong. They talk about disintegration, but of course we are different states. They however do not perceive that the mentality and the objectives are the same. I mean, even with Tajikistan, there are examples of cooperation, especially on, guess what? Water! We get the amount of water we agreed on, and we pay regularly.²³⁴

Moreover, it was not just Karimov who actively travelled around the region (Astana and Ashgabat) to consolidate the front of downstream countries, but also Kazakh Foreign Minister, Erlan Idrissov. At the end of March 2013, he visited both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to try to find out common approaches to the Rogun issue, and to defuse tensions. The mission in Uzbekistan paved the way for the institutionalisation of the shared position of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan on the matter, as water management, as it became part of the new Strategic Partnership Agreement between the two countries (Assenova 2013). In Dushanbe, Idrissov met with President Emomali Rahmon and Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi, and they all reaffirmed their commitment to coordinate and mutually support their foreign policy initiatives to advance their shared interests.

Yet, he did not refrain from voicing Kazakhstan's official position on the matter, based on customary norms of international law and diplomatic resolution of controversies:

The states in the upper waters should not violate the rights and economic interests of the states located in the lower waters, and vice versa. There are international conventions according to which the two sides should sit at the negotiating table and work out a mutually acceptable scheme for the usage of water resources.²³⁵

Upstream countries as well have voiced their intention, in what would seem to be an international society logic in play, voicing their concerns for downstream countries and the importance of their needs and claims.

Already in 2012 Tajik Prime Minister Aqil Aqilov said in an open letter to his Uzbek counterpart Shavkat Mirziyoyev that Tajikistan would consider the

²³⁴ Interview with Uzbek Official Source 1 and 2.

²³⁵ Ibidem.

environment and water balance in building the Rogun hydropower plant and will never do anything to harm its neighbors.

As we can see, international concerns and responsibilities, or, to use Robert Jackson's phrase, 'prudential norms' have been indeed in play, if not always adamantly. Indeed, on this delicate issue, national and international responsibilities, realist and rationalist logics, are constantly at play. This is exemplified by Aqilov's words themselves:

As to the essence of this problem, I would like to stress the unwavering position of Tajikistan. Not a single project we implement *is targeted against another country*, and we are ready for the closest cooperation with neighbors *with due account of national interests* (emphasis added).²³⁶

Both the former Tajik Minister of Foreign Affairs Hamrokhon Zarifi and the Kyrgyz Prime Minister Joomart Otorbayev have stated that in no case would their projects harm downstream countries. As we have stated above, an international society conception of world politics should entail the consideration of 'international responsibility', that is, the concern, the worries, the thoughts for the other members of the social group where an actor lives and acts. Should these responsibilities not be present, or even considered and, worst case scenario, should their absence not be even justified, we would have a plain realist logic and the absolute prevalence of a 'national responsibility' *modus operandi*. But international responsibilities are indeed present in Central Asia, even on such tough matters as water management and transboundary dams.

In winter 2012, at the meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Dublin on 6 December, the then Tajik Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi stressed the importance for Tajikistan of the principles of diplomatic conduct, openness and 'in the interest of all countries in Central Asia' (Avesta 2012).

In the summer of 2013, the Permanent Representative of Tajikistan at the UN, Shirodjidin Aslov (now Minister of Foreign Affairs), made references to the interests and the concerns of all the countries of the region, and emphasised diplomacy and consultations as the primary means to resolve the dispute between upstream and downstream countries (Avesta 2013c).

236 'Tajikistan affirms absence of Rogun dam threat to Uzbekistan'.

In July 2014, the Kyrgyz Prime Minister Joomart Otorbayev pledged that Kyrgyz hydropower facilities will not leave downstream countries without water, therefore fully respecting their interests, their needs and the basic provisions of international law. Furthermore, the Minister of Energy Osmonbek Artykbayev assured that the technical and economic assessment for Kambarata was prepared by an international company with consideration of interests of all riparian countries (Akipress 2014d).

From an international society perspective, what this indicates is that there is an international responsibility felt by the two upstream countries, and a societal logic that requires them to take into account others into consideration. Maybe it is not sufficient for full-fledged cooperation, but *it simply can't be dismissed*. Were only realist logics in play, it would be clear that blatant national interest would prevail and the needs of neighbours would be ignored.

This is in line with Robert Jackson's argument (2000) that in realism (or 'Hobbesianism', or 'system') we observe national responsibilities, in the ES (or 'Grotianism', or 'society') international responsibilities, and in liberalism (or 'Kantism', or world society) humanitarian responsibilities. What we observe in Central Asia in the water-management sector is therefore a complex interplay between the realist element of the system and the societal element of...*the society*.

To be sure, national interests and power-politics logics have been in play. We have reviewed the actions from the Uzbek sides,²³⁷ we should not forget and downplay the fact that Karimov even hinted at war to prevent the construction of Rogun, claiming that '[Rogun] is a serious confrontation. It may even become a cause of war in the region' in the longer term (Trend 2012a) and we may recall that President Rahmon has repeatedly stated that Rogun will be built, no matter what, no matter how. On 23 April 2014, addressing a joint meeting of both chambers of the parliament in Dushanbe, he stated that the construction of the Rogun hydroelectric power plant 'is the fateful project for Tajikistan' (Asia Plus 2014a; Menga 2014).

Yet, the purpose of this whole narrative is to show that there is *more* than that. And that diplomacy and dialogue, contrary to a vast part of the literature on Central Asia reviewed at the beginning of the thesis, are indeed *complex, alive and pervasive*.

237 From an ES perspective, justifications from the Uzbek side revealed that a norm, albeit violated, was in play. Otherwise, there would not be need for justifications. The norms in play were that of good-neighbourliness, right of passage, right of access for goods destined to Tajikistan. On justifications, see Jackson (2000: 49; 67-68) and, in particular, Finnemore (1996: 23-24; 141).

In the words of an Uzbek anonymous source,

[With Tajikistan], the problem is very specific. It's water management. And as the word says, it's management. The problem is manageable. There is constant inter-agency dialogue and you know, it is not true that we don't talk to each other. Far from reality! Karimov and Emomali [Rahmon] talk at meetings: CIS, SCO, you know...they talk. Sure, it is very difficult. We would like to have an institutional, bilateral meeting between the two. We are thinking of it, but there must be conditions. There is an understanding, mutual understanding on the UN and the WB. On that, we found common ground. The meeting will happen, sooner or later. We need to know what they think in Dushanbe. You ask about other options? Of course, bilateral solutions. We try to avoid Great Power interference. Conflict is absolutely not an option. C'mon, we are responsible powers!²³⁸

It is testament to my interviewee's words that the much-awaited meeting between Rahmon and Karimov finally took place on 12 September 2014, on the sides of the SCO meeting in Dushanbe. The talks had been scheduled on 22 July 2014 during a bilateral meeting between the Uzbek and the Tajik Foreign Ministers, Abdulaziz Kamilov and Shirodjidin Aslov. In it, a new phase of Uzbek-Tajik relations was ignited, stressing the expansion of friendly and good-neighbourly relations. Problems between the two neighbours were divided in three categories: those of immediate solution, those more difficult to solve and those that would require much more time to solve.

It is important to note that the meeting was preceded by other conciliatory gestures, namely that of leaving borders open in the occasion of Tajik Independence Day (9 September) and a telegram from Rahmon to Karimov on Uzbekistan's Independence Day (1 September) stressing the need of giving renewed dynamism to bilateral relations, something considered as one of Tajikistan's foreign policy priorities. Two weeks after the meeting, Zafar Rahimzanov, Counsellor of the Uzbek Embassy in Dushanbe, stated that Uzbekistan expected and hoped for significant changes in the bilateral relations between the two countries.

Following the already noted conciliatory trends between the two republics, after this meeting there have been other examples of cooperative behaviour. Murodali Alimardon and Rustam Azimov, Vice Premiers of respectively Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, met on 28-29 October 2014 in Tashkent on the sides of an IFAS meeting

238 Interview with Official Uzbek source.

to discuss bilateral cooperation in the water-management sector.

Furthermore, after almost fifteen years, resumption of direct flights between Dushanbe and Tashkent were agreed on, although not yet formalised. One day later, Tajik Ambassador to Uzbekistan Muzaffar Huseinov was received by Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov to discuss the status of bilateral cooperation. In early January 2015, Dushanbe and Tashkent officially agreed to give dynamism to bilateral relations.

At the time of writing, it is not fully possible to predict what the situation will be if Rogun is built. Too many variables, mainly economic and political, are still in play to give a safe assessment of how regional politics will be affected by this. The WB has recently released its preliminary report where it appears that the Rogun project is feasible, and therefore can go ahead (World Bank 2014a).

How downstream countries, and especially Uzbekistan, will react, will be a testing ground for the *Grundnorm* of each society, *pacta sunt servanda*.

5.6 Conclusions

Through the analysis of these two case studies, this chapter tried to demonstrate that, far from being uncooperative and confrontational, Central Asian intra-regional politics is indeed a sizzling environment, a mosaic of dialogue, practices and norms, which range from the power-political spectrum of international society to the coexistence-cooperative one (Buzan 2004). The value of the ES approach adopted above is exactly that of keeping together the hostile and the friendly, the negative and the positive, the realist brute facts and the liberal hopes.

It was absolutely far from my intention to give a portrait of the Central Asian region as mono-dimensional, as black or white, as either uncooperative or cooperative. Rather, one of the aims was exactly that of showing the *co*-presence of realist and liberal elements, of demonstrating that in Central Asian politics, as in every social dimension of human life, behaviours, decisions, thoughts and actions are never one-sided, but always reflect the complex interplay of national interests and the demands of the system of reference, the need to maintain the system working, the societal commitments.

A second aim was to show that the dead-letter international society present in the 1990s has evolved not in an a-social regional structure, but in a strongly pluralist one. Central Asia, due to the systemic changes and internal processes reviewed at the

beginning of the chapter, has moved from a cooperative-integrative model of international society to a co-existential, power-political one, where national interests are far more prominent than (but nonetheless not overwhelming) external commitments to other members of the region.

The usual argument that the Central Asian states are drifting more and more apart from each other and that this is *bad* may hold in a regionalist framework, where integrative and cooperative practices are put under scrutiny, but not from an international society perspective. Even if in terms of economic and foreign policy they may be taking different directions (something that I try to challenge in the next chapter), they still have to manage their common life as neighbours. And the analysis above (as well as the one in the former chapter) suggests that this management is indeed carried out following some minimal precepts, norms, practices aimed at preserving inter-state stability and order.

It is not by chance that the institutions that we found operating in the region are those typical of a pluralist international society: sovereignty, international law, diplomacy, summitry, above all. In fact, one may say that the three conditions sustaining an international society set forth by Hedley Bull are indeed present in Central Asia: limitation of violence (observable in the institution of summitry and diplomacy), right of property (non-interference and sovereignty) and respect of agreements (international law).

Even if what follows is a topic I will deal with in the conclusions of the thesis, it is worth spending a couple of words on how the institutions above have been identified. This is clearly a question of epistemology (how do we know?) and methodology (by what set of assumptions do we know?). Barry Buzan has described ‘international society’ as an ontology that may exist in three different forms (2014: 18-20):

- as a set of ideas in the mind of statesmen (Charles Manning);
- as a set of ideas in the mind of political philosophers (Martin Wight);
- as an analytical construct/set of concepts in the mind of the investigator/researcher (Hedley Bull, Alan James).

Although clearly experiencing some difficulties and not claiming at all that my investigation has produced perfect results, I have tried to combine all the three

‘manifestations’ of international society listed above.

The third manifestation is actually inevitable. As a scholar familiar with the notion of international society and the analytical terms associated to it (pluralism, solidarism, institutions, norms and the like), and willing to explore ‘international society’ dynamics in Central Asia, there was no way I could avoid applying to the region the taxonomy and analytical vocabulary of the theory I am using. In other and simpler words, if my aim is to find an international society, I must know what an international society looks like.

Yet, I did not confine myself to my analytical ‘imposition’, but I tried to adhere to the premise made in chapter 3, that is, to adopt a *Verstehen* mode of inquiry, an inductive method of analysis to disclose if an international society is present in the mind of those participating in it (first point of Buzan’s tripartition). To do this, as shown, I relied both on written as well as on spoken sources. In particular, interviews with diplomats and practitioners have given those insights that lead us to understand whether this ‘international society’ is perceived by the protagonists, by the members of it.

But that was not enough. To cover myself from possible ‘ready-made’ answers, from hypocrisy or from propagandistic narratives, I complemented statesmen’s discourses with those of strategists, analysts and academics, who can be included in the second slot of Buzan’s tripartition. They are acquainted with the international relations of the region, they are more critical and more analytical, they are from the region and they are not necessarily familiar with the notion of international society. This last point is indeed crucial. During the interviews, they used a terminology, a vocabulary, a narrative consistent with an international society approach, exactly conforming to a *Verstehen* methodology, to an inductive process, to ‘something in the mind of political philosophers’ (*latu sensu*).

Last but not least, the identification of the practices, of the institutions operating in Central Asia has proceeded also via an empirical analysis (Buzan 2014: 173-178), via direct observation, via information this time deducted from the material at my disposal. The purpose of all this was to show that *there is something going on*. It is not that in the region there are no relations, no societal bonds, no social considerations, no international responsibilities (Cummings 2012). There are indeed! Simply, they are not as neat and rosy as liberals would like.

Power-political elements still exist in the region, and constantly hinder the development of a full-fledged, more comprehensive and integrated solidarist international society. But the key point is that there is *interplay*, not exclusion. And the ES approach that I have decided to adopt was instrumental exactly in bringing this interplay to the surface.

Before concluding this chapter one may ask: is the regional international society present in Central Asia anyhow different from that at the global level? And if yes, how?

At first sight, the answers seems to be ‘no’. The institutions of sovereignty, non-interference and territorial integrity, international law, diplomacy, environmentalism all have a place in the region, and these institutions are exactly those that we find at the global level, indiscriminately, across the globe. Structurally, they identify a community of sovereign and independent states. Functionally, they serve the scope of preserving peace, stability and the ‘workability’ of the system.

Indeed, we have seen above how the movement from a dead-letter society to a more ideal-typical anarchical society in the region has been favoured by a more rigid conceptualisation of the territorial institutions of sovereignty, non-interference and territorial integrity, backed by more frequent appeals to international law.

One exception may be GPM. We have already noticed how, for serious issues not concerning relations between Central Asian states, GPM is ‘invited’ via inside-push mechanisms. Yet, when issues arise between Central Asian states, GPM is banned from operating, and bilateralism substitutes it. Given the strongly Westphalian interpretation of sovereignty in the region, states tend to see themselves as equals and refrain from attributing special concessions to Karimov and Nazarbayev, despite their seniority and their material power. An indigenous, institutionalised GPM has yet to be institutionalised.

Yet, on 26 November 2014, in a meeting with Karimov, Nazarbayev has hinted at a co-dominium in Central Asia, thus implicitly referring to an indigenous GPM: ‘People in our nations are paying close attention to this visit, as the stability and development of the region depends on the ideas espoused and joint efforts undertaken by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan’. ‘With warm embrace, Nazarbayev and Karimov call for stronger ties between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan’ (Bupezhanova 2014).

Despite GPM, therefore, if one looks at the institutions present in the region

horizontally (i.e. by looking at their mere presence), one does not find significant differences between how these institutions are played in Central Asia and in the West (or, in Buzanian terms, ‘at the global level’).

Yet, I argue that if one looks at the Central Asian institutions *vertically* (i.e. by looking at their entrenchment, internalisation in the social structure of the region, and adoption), then we have a slightly different picture. To my knowledge, differentiating international societies on the basis of the stability of certain institutions is something the ES has yet to engage with.

So far, the regional approach to international society has always looked at institutional consonance, surplus or deficit, that is, when the regional society has more institutions than the international society at the global level and when the regional society has fewer institutions than the international society at the global level (Diez and Whitman 2002; Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009; Stivachtis 2013; Stivachtis 2014). But to differentiate societies on the basis of the entrenchment of their institutions is something that is still missing from the English School panorama. The shift of the analysis, clearly, goes from the *adoption* to the *practice* of the institution.

To understand this, and to have a feeling of the more informal character of the Central Asian international society with respect to the Western/global one, I analysed above the strength of institutions and practices informing them, but I also spoke to *local* practitioners and analysts, strategists and academics acquainted with the foreign policies and the international behaviour of the state where they are located.

A content analysis of the responses of my interviewees reveals that the notions of ‘learning’, ‘adapting’, ‘readiness’ are very much in their minds, suggesting that not only are international relations between Central Asian states still in formation, but also that the institutional consonance between Central Asia and the Western/Global international society is still work in progress.

From a structural perspective, and from the point of view of the relations enjoyed by the countries in the region, the mixture of formality and informality of relations may well explain why Central Asia is still between a power-political *modus operandi* and a pure co-existential one. The institutions of the Central Asian international society are not solid enough to make it a security community, but are certainly present and operating, thus avoiding a slippery path toward a pure confrontational environment. But let us see how the institutions of sovereignty, diplomacy and international law are played out in the region.

In the words of a Kazakh academic, ‘sovereignty [in Central Asia] has to be studied very well from our perspective. In the region there is a shallow understanding, primitive interpretation of independence and sovereignty’, claiming that in Central Asia sovereignty is very much akin to Stephen Krasner’s Westphalian sovereignty (1999), based on strict non-interference and territorial integrity, which are respected by all countries in the region.²³⁹ This understanding of sovereignty, which is contrasted with the more ‘solidarised’ version promoted by the West at the global level (and by the EU at the regional one), is well perceived by local practitioners. Askar Nursha conveys the idea of a ‘difference’ between the regional and the global level very well:

The Central Asian states, governments, *do adhere* to the norms of sovereignty and international law but the problem is that now *the West has its own interpretation of them!* In particular, *sovereignty is the most prioritized [norm]*.²⁴⁰

Of the same advice is Zhenis Kembayev:

With respect to sovereignty, what you observe *here* is the *classic conception, impermeable, supreme power, which means independence from each other. Very Westphalian*. Due to this, cooperation is potential, but it is based on consensus, on full consensus. For something to be implemented, full consensus among the presidents must be reached.²⁴¹

The ‘billiard ball’ approach to sovereignty of the Central Asian states is reported also by another Kazakh expert:

They [Central Asian states] have a *very personal, their own understanding of sovereignty*. Due to their Soviet legacy, their understanding of sovereignty is very much motivated and inspired by Soviet rule and it is *black and white*. The way in which the Soviet system would *interpret* sovereignty would be based on legacies of Stalin and Lenin. The principle in which they *understood* sovereignty was ‘you don’t touch us, we don’t intervene in your things’.²⁴²

An official Uzbek source, who preferred to remain anonymous, arguing that ‘in this region, sovereignty is *central*, and I stress, central, especially for Uzbekistan. [...] We

239 Interview with Kazakh Professor 2.

240 Interview Almaty, Kazakhstan, November 14, 2013.

241 Interview.

242 Interview.

won't cede an iota of it [sic]'.²⁴³ Yet, even in the interpretation of sovereignty there is still an element of informality, according to a representative of the UNRCCA:

If you ask a politician or me in my official capacity, I would certainly say that they are really important, of course, international law, UN charter, principles of international...law...I mean, everybody knows about them and they would use it in the right way, but in reality is not that important...like, I mean, Uzbekistan is not invading Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan not because of these principles, but for other principles [...]. Yes, *they are more cultural principles*...and also...are like, for example...*these principles are there, but there is something else, more cultural*...of course they will use these principles in the common language, but we get it, because we know that Uzbekistan is such a powerful country in a military way, I mean, they can invade Kyrgyzstan and conquer it in one day, and we know it, and we have no capacity to resist...even the president knows...but still....²⁴⁴

And the same interplay between law and personal factors is stressed by another expert based in Kyrgyzstan, with working experience in regional diplomacy:

By *inertia* we entered international society, but the entrance was a symbolic action, you know, we want to dictate our existence, just imagine, we are member of so many institutions! *It's a performance of sovereignty*. I would not say there was and is the scholarship, the expertise on *what does it mean how to exercise sovereignty*. I think *it still needs some time*. And with respect to non interference, again, I would say it is *more informal*, like interactions at the borders, the elders, the aqsqaqs, even presidents themselves, *more like 'you are my brother', it is not merely the respect of a norm, it is, again, openly informal discourse*. Karimov can say we are not interfering in south Kyrgyzstan because we are good members of the UN or whatever, of course he can say it, but the region knows it's not motivated by that, *it is motivated by the reality of the region, by calculations of what it is good or bad for the countries and their national interest*. [...] It is because of circumstances.²⁴⁵

The interplay between the 'rule' and the 'personal factor' is evident also in the analysis that Emil Juraev gives of the notion of sovereignty:

Leaderships of all countries, possibly in every speech they talk they mention the idea of sovereignty, famously Uzbekistan, they have this topological notion of sovereignty [...] same with all other countries [...] *there is a tension with sovereignty, however, when states are identified with their particular ruling regime, with the*

243 Interview.

244 Interview.

245 Interview with Expert in Kyrgyzstan.

political person at its head. So to understand Uzbekistan's sovereign foreign policy, we have to understand Karimov's foreign policy. In the West, you would understand that state sovereignty is much more institutionalised, there is the idea of the state as such, while here the president is essentially it. What comes out as a sovereign action here is the president.

Let us now observe the practice of international law as studied by practitioners and academics. In this subsection, also the practice of mediation will be reviewed, as anticipated above. Here, the level of internalisation of the institution is far shallower, as it is evident from the vocabulary used by the interviewees. Again, according to Emil Juraev,²⁴⁶

Within the region, again, there is a mixture of international law, that it is certainly established, and *various informal relations*, different ways of dealing with each other. [...] Whenever some serious things happen one thing is the attempt of one president to call the other president to discuss it at that level, *without putting it [the issue] to the control of international public law*. This kind of amicable relations are of course not always working, especially now. But these kinds of informal relations are continuing on, and I think *when they refer to international public law is when it comes to much more technical issues, that would not be touching upon sensitivities. It is probably understood as a bad sign when the states refer to international law, it's an alien code of behaviour, instead of discussing between us...* On border issues, when somebody asks the UN, or an impartial third party in the world to...to discuss and help us, the matter between us, the reaction by most knowledgeable people is "you don't do that, it is an internal thing between the two countries, we will decide it our way", and it is a work of diplomacy, is a work of testing, nurturing some kinds of relationships with the other party.

Of the same advice seems to be Marat Kazakhbayev,²⁴⁷

When there are problems between countries, in general, they [the leaders] consider the *informal aspects of politics, personal relations, and also international law*. Usually international law is more frequently used in specific areas, such as economics, or territory, so there are international mechanisms, and also in terms of borders and water problems as well. But if I had to say which factor is more important, I would say that *in Central Asia prevails the personal factor*. There is very much informal diplomacy, we even had inter-marriages! And of course informal diplomacy is very much visible among countries; *unfortunately, in Central Asia, personal connections, personal factors and informal diplomacy come before international law*. Documents on their own do not mean anything,

246 Interview.

247 Interview.

personal relations inform them. The case of Kambarata is a good example, it will be built only if there is consensus among the parties, even if Kyrgyzstan is right from an international law perspective. My general impression is that *if you resort to international law in this region, you are not willing to solve the issue personally, and therefore that is bad. It's a third body of rules, external to the parties. But of course they point at the basic rules of it, there is still the need for them.*

But perhaps the most interesting words come from a Kazakh international lawyer, with proximate acquaintance of how this institution works within the region:

International law in the region is *highly informal*. I mean, these states know international law, there is international law, but at the highest level, i.e. dealing with the world. *In the region, you have something different.* [...] [The leaders] sign, they celebrate, but then, when problems arise, governments have to find ways to regulate the situation. *It is bargaining, trading.* And also, *you have to think of your neighbour, you cannot do as you please. They know it. In this respect, Russia is different, they are more professional, more developed, they have an understanding of international law that is more legal. Here it goes like this: even if we know we have the rules, we can solve things more quickly with a phone call, or quicker methods.* With European countries Central Asian states would try to bargain as well, but they would be unsuccessful as *the European understanding of international law is much more legalistic. In terms of arbitration, there is no tradition whatsoever.* There was something like that in the pre-Soviet period, with the biis, the elders, the aqsaqs, but never at the level of states. It takes time to adapt to it, it is an institution, you know...it is also too far, no one knows the international court of justice, they have never worked with it, no connections, no trust. There is no ownership, and it costs! *It is better to solve things between themselves, without third parties. It's easy to talk to each other. In the region, you see that it is the national interest that prevails, but at least they would explain why they are not conforming to international law.* To incorporate international standards would for sure stabilise the regional structure in terms of international relations, but the development of these states is preventing it. *They are not professional enough, [there is] slow adaptation.*²⁴⁸

The notion of slow adaptation, professionalism²⁴⁹ and ‘craft’ of such institutions resonates also in the words of a former Kyrgyz diplomat:

²⁴⁸ Interview with international lawyer in Kazakhstan, 12 May 2014.

²⁴⁹ To date, the ES has still to engage with the link between internalisation of institutions and the professionalism of the domestic, societal sector responsible for its adoption. The only exception is Gaskarth (2010).

Why international law is *shallow* here? Look, we have no lawyers at the international level! That's why we lose in arbitration courts, or why indeed *we are reluctant to go to arbitration. We don't speak English, just imagine!* We now have the figure of the "Special Representative in International Courts", thanks to the Decision 89 [2/2014] of our president, but you see, it was instructed only this year!²⁵⁰

Very interesting, and very open and sincere, also the perspective offered by Uzbek practitioners, who nonetheless have preferred to remain anonymous:

Even in the resolution of regional matters, *we actually do not refer that much to international law, it is a Western imposition...* [Uzbek 2]: yeah, it's a Western...a Western imposition, yeah, I mean, they say why you don't consult the ICJ and so on, but...*here is different, we rely more on human values, on acquaintances, on personal relations.*²⁵¹

And official Uzbek source as well:

With respect to international law, we do refer to it. Just, we highly scrutinise it. We don't want to find ourselves in the situation of having our national legislation infringed. And I think through the region is the same. *If there is a conflict of norms, international and national, national interest would prevail. C'mon, where wouldn't it prevail?! What we reject vehemently is international arbitration. Why? Because this would infringe sovereignty!* As soon as we put power on an international institution, we lose sovereignty. Of course, on business matters we go to arbitration. But usually, *in the region we first refer to dialogue, mainly bilateral, public information, so on. When we realise it is impossible [to solve the problem] we put international law in play. These are regional practices.*²⁵²

The specificity of the regional practices is also reiterated by two other Uzbek official sources, when, speaking of sovereignty and international law, they stated that 'many of the norms that regulate international politics *were born in the West...* we are looking at it, but at *our pace* and with *our specificity*'.²⁵³ Nuria Kutnaeva reports the same points, arguing that international law in Central Asia is valid if it does not infringe the national interest:

the basic, minimal rules are applied, understood and incorporated, but *whenever the national interest is infringed, then supremacy is*

250 Interview.

251 Interview.

252 Interview.

253 Interview with two representatives of the Institute for Strategic and Regional studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Tashkent, December 13, 2013.

*given to national interest, especially when issues of not-well specified “national security” are in play. [...] Tajikistan turned to Russia in order to resolve border problems, this was seen as a bad act in the region, both by Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. If you turn to a third party, you don’t recognise equality, you break the deal, you acknowledge a big brother. You infringe equality, you create a hierarchy. No one liked the move, you don’t do this in Central Asia.*²⁵⁴

The utilitarian aspect of international law in the region and the prevalence of informal practices over it are to be found also in the words of Sultan Akimbekov:

*In the region, of course they [the presidents] know international law, and they declare it. But Realpolitik is Realpolitik. Of course they try to decide and resolve things with talks. This is our local situation, our local tactics. They use international law for the interest of the state. Of course we are new member of the community and maybe sometimes we are not ready to commit ourselves to international law. Arbitration is not the first instrument we use. Maybe second, or third, you know. But not first. First thing is to try to resolve between states, between us.*²⁵⁵

Azamat Temirkulov, academic and expert of foreign policies in the region between Central Asian states, makes a parallel with diplomacy:

*Of course in Central Asia you have personal diplomacy, of course! Informal meetings, informal connections...in Central Asia there are more personal, informal aspects than official diplomatic connections. If you take foreign policy of European states, which is very well structured, defined, the national interest is clear, you know who is responsible...in Central Asia you don’t have it, they don’t know what’s the national interest, who is in charge of protecting it. Again, it is related to the notion of statehood, state-building. The case of Central Asia is completely different. We had experience of bureaucratic institutions of course during the Soviet times, but they were planned, common, which are different from state ones...so we have to adapt to this new environment, we have to learn how to engage in foreign relations...we are still learning!*²⁵⁶

What do all these words reveal? How do they play against the empirical analysis made above? They do not contradict the findings. In fact, they back them. In almost all the quotes reported here, we find several references to a *particular* international society.

254 Interview.

255 Interview.

256 Interview with Azamat Temirkulov, Professor of International Relations at AUCA, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, December 5, 2013.

First of all, there is the issue of *indexicality*.²⁵⁷ That is to say, all the interviewees (also those whose words have not been reported here) use words such as ‘here’, ‘in the West’, ‘for us’, ‘in this region’, ‘among us’ frequently, i.e. indexes, to categorise and divide the logic of thought and practice. ‘Here’ it works so, ‘there’ it works differently. This, it may be said, created already some sort of boundaries around the Central Asian region. I.e., they see themselves as forming a group of actors whose rules may be different from those in other places in the world.

Secondly, there is the issue of formality/informality. The interviewees are not saying that sovereignty, international law and diplomacy are non-existent. We have seen that indeed these are the norms, the practices that help the system, the region to be relatively peaceful and ordered. Also, many of them speak of a ‘background knowledge’, of a common and shared practice when basic rules of coexistence are demanded and required. What they argue, especially with respect to international law, is that their entrenchment is sometimes too soft (as in the case of international law) and sometimes too hard (as in the case of sovereignty) to guarantee a solid, stable and more cooperative international society.

International law is known, understood and used by all states in the region, but often as an instrument to support national interest rather than as an abstract, and impartial, framework or rules valid for everyone. Personal connections, informal chats, phone-calls and even dinners and post-conference meetings are, in the words of the interviewees, far more effective in regulating relations in Central Asia than the abstract, formal instrument of the law. When international law is invoked, in sum, it is because something is broken at the inter-personal level. Interestingly, when it is mentioned in the region is because things are getting *worse* (while, at the global level, it is the norm).

This analysis of the informality of some of the institutions of the Central Asian international society fits well with the structural analysis conducted above. Given that the institutions present there have not been fully legitimised, entrenched and ‘localised’, their effectiveness in managing order and stability is constantly put under strain, placing the Central Asian society in between of a power-political system of relations and a more pacific, ‘coexistential’ one. Recall the words of the Kazakh international lawyer reported above: ‘To incorporate international standards *would for*

257 I have developed the notions of ‘indexicality’ and ‘polysemy’ in ES theory in another work. See Costa Buranelli (2014b).

sure stabilise the regional structure in terms of international relations, but the development of these states is preventing it’.

The fact that several interviewees mentioned the presence of personal interests and calculation when dealing with norms and institutions, again, fits with the analysis above, where I have constantly reminded the reader of the *co*-presence of competitive and cooperative elements in the intra-regional politics of Central Asia (and, indeed, in the general ES framework).

But they do not discard the adoption of norms and rules. The fact that governments refer to them, claim that they have to be respected, and point at their role in solving controversies signifies their presence and acceptance. The shallow interiorisation, or the depth of their understanding/adoption (Wendt 1999; Buzan 2004) does not exclude *a priori* the fact that these norms are operating in the Central Asian social environment.

We have also seen that international responsibilities are called for by all states in the region, if, again, mixed with strong support for their own national interests. If these claims for ‘the neighbours’, ‘the region’, ‘the other countries’ are merely window-dressing, why bother with them this much? The references to such terms show that, even if very shallow, a societal conception of the region is present in the mind of Central Asian statesmen. Worth stressing, by societal conception I do not mean cooperative at all. I simply mean that there is consideration, account for others, and the search for common rules and norms to find a *via media* between the different, contrasting positions. This is what international society, in its essence, is all about (Jackson 2000).

Also, common references to the region coming from all states forming it, plus the use of terms like ‘coexistence’, ‘mechanisms’ and ‘thresholds’ and the entrenched term ‘Central Asia’ in my interviewees’ answers all point at the existence of something more than a pure realist system of relations in the region.

Another hint that we find with respect to the ‘shallowness’ of international society and its institutions in Central Asia is in the vocabulary used by the interviewees. Terms such as ‘inertia’, ‘no experience’, ‘need of time’, ‘informality’, ‘the West’, ‘more/less institutionalised’, ‘personal relations’, ‘bargaining trading’, ‘no tradition’, ‘adaptation’, ‘learning’, ‘no professionalism’, ‘shallowness’, ‘imposition [of an institution]’, ‘acquaintances’, ‘human values [as opposed to the rule of law]’, ‘connections’, ‘new environment’, ‘alien’, ‘our pace’, ‘our specificities’, ‘us’ [as

opposed to ‘you/them’], ‘local’, ‘difference’ all reflect a social environment that not only is different from the wider environment where it is located (and here we have the global/regional dichotomy), but also a social environment *in fieri*, under construction, in the process of stabilisation.

In the light of this, and by looking at the two case studies analysed above, we can advance the claim that in the 2000s Central Asia still constitutes an international society on its own, exactly because of the particular understanding and interpretation of the institutions of sovereignty, diplomacy and, most of all, international law. I argue also that other institutions may well differentiate Central Asia from the international society at the global level, such as the Aral Sea, the CANFWZ and neopatrimonial authoritarianism as observed in Chapter 4.

The mixture of realism and liberalism, of confrontation and cooperation, of fight and dialogue, of interest and commitment, of prudence and procedure (Jackson 2000) is a defining feature of this region, in spite of the negative, power-political accounts of it (Torjesen 2008). Especially in water-management, we have noticed through an analysis of the practices of statesmen that there is a normative, diplomatic substratum that, at least for now, is keeping the region resilient and free from conflict. Aidos Sarym, a prominent political analyst in Kazakhstan, used a very powerful metaphor borrowed from literature (and significantly related to water) to describe the present state of affairs in Central Asia:

There are two very good allegories to describe Central Asia, from the Book of Jungle [*sic*] of Kipling: the first one is the law of jungle, and the second one is water reconciliation. So if there is a drought, all the animals go to the same spring, and drink together. In times of drought, you can have the law of the jungle, but water reconciliation can prevent it. The five Central Asian countries are trying to stay away from the law of the jungle and to seek water reconciliation. There is a demand for it; among the elites, among the people, there are searches for that.²⁵⁸

Having shown that an international society is also at play in Central Asia in the 2000s, and that this international society is indeed perceived by its members there, the next chapter focuses on the ‘international dimension’ of this international society. That is, I investigate the norms and rules endorsed and sponsored by the Central Asian states at

258 Interview with Aidos Sarym, Political Risk Assessment Group, Almaty, Kazakhstan, November 17, 2013.

the international level, and I ask whether there is convergence or divergence among them. Therefore, we will leave (geographically speaking) Central Asia for one chapter. The arena that I use as a proxy for the ‘international level’ is the UNGA.

Chapter 6

Central Asian international society at the international level: norms, rules and institutions supported in the UN General Assembly²⁵⁹

6.1 Introduction

The thesis has so far dealt with the intra-regional aspects of international relations of the Central Asian states. The norms, institutions and rules adopted by them in their mutual dealings since 1991 have been identified, analysed and commented on. Also, the changes in the structural as well as in the type of the Central Asian international society have been discussed and presented, ranging from a dead-letter, solidarist international society in the 1990s to a more ‘coexistential’, pluralistic one in the 2000s.

Yet, it is believed that in order to show whether there are shared norms, rules and institutions in the region, looking at the mere intra-regional dimension is valuable but perhaps not sufficient. We need to explore if such shared normative approach to international relations is visible also in other *loci* than the region itself. That is, we need *to project* the international society in Central Asia *onto the international stage*. It is clear that, if there is correspondence between what we have observed in the region and what we observe at the international level, then the thesis benefits from additional validation, being its argument entrenched not just from one side (the regional level of analysis) but from two (the regional and the global level of analysis).

As we noted while reviewing the literature on the region, it seems that since the demise of the USSR in 1991 Central Asia has been caught in two conflicting dimensions: victim of its past, hostage of its future. The literature on the international relations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan has often discussed how the past of the region could mark its future developments, how territorial and inter-ethnic strife, silenced under Soviet rule, would affect the intra-regional international relations in an explosive mixture of chaos and disorder. By the same token, the future of Central Asia has often been at the forefront of scholarly research on the region: what will happen in future has been the common question condemning Central Asia to a perennial status of suspension in the international

²⁵⁹ An earlier version of this chapter has been published as Costa Buranelli (2014c).

system: on the edge of, on the brinks of, one step from (Hashim and Rashid 1992, Hyman 1993, Jones Luong and Wienthal 2002, Akçali 2003, Kleveman 2003, Rashid 2008). Therefore, a cornerstone of this thesis has been that very few academic works, if any, have highlighted the fact that, once independent, the Central Asian states entered a world with not only material structures and geopolitical imperatives, but normative and institutional webs as well, where they had to find their place. Consequently, an analysis of the international behaviour of the Central Asian republics is still missing from the substantive literature on the region, which has been more concerned with assessing international influences *on* the region, rather than on how these states ‘see’ the international (see for example Warkotsch 2007, Jackson 2010, Kavalski 2012, Lewis 2012a).

The reason why this short digression on the literature has been brought into the picture again is that in fact one of the first acts these states undertook, once independent, was joining the UN, both to substantiate the *de jure* character of their independence and to participate in the shaping of those norms and rules that regulate and inform world politics.²⁶⁰ Thus, the first purpose of this brief chapter is to fill this lacuna in the literature on the international relations of the Central Asian republics.

A second aim of this chapter, as said, is to translate to the international dimension the cooperation-competition debate that has characterised the literature on regional politics in Central Asia. The literature on intra-regional relations has always stressed, with undoubted merits, the basic un-cooperative nature of Central Asian intra-regional relations, highlighting patterns of disintegration and competition, factors of de- if not of contra-regionalisation (Spechler 2002, Bohr 2004, Linn 2007, Allison 2008, Libman and Vinokurov 2011, Cooley 2012: 149-153). Bitter disagreements over energy and water resources, border delimitation and territorial disputes in the region make even the most optimist analysts doubtful of substantive regional cooperation in the near future. And indeed in the course of the thesis it has been stressed several times that the presence of norms, rules and institutions has *tamed*, but not *eliminated*, the overall underlying confrontational, antagonistic nature of the regional environment.

Yet, it is believed that given what has been discussed in the thesis, that is

260 On March 2, 1992, all the five Central Asian states completed their procedure of admission to the UN, being accepted as full members with unanimous votes of the General Assembly at its 82nd plenary meeting.

Central Asian states' common historical legacy, common political background and the fact that the physical, geographic system presents them with the same, serious political, demographic and environmental challenges, at the international level there is possibly more agreement among them than within the region itself. This discrepancy may be explained by assuming that while at the international level norms and rules are only professed and supported, within the region decisions have to be taken, thus running the risk of challenging personal interests and sovereign rights (Collins 2009).

Setting out the premises of this chapter in a slightly different way than the previous ones, instead of proceeding with a narrative of events here I present four hypotheses:

- H₁: given their general condition as third-world countries (Ayoob 1995; Abdullaev 2002: 245) and their past political, social and economic experiences, their normative orientation on the international scene is highly convergent;
- H₂: given their still incomplete process of state-building, the norms endorsed by the Central Asian republics are those typical of a pluralist, Westphalian inter-state system, and therefore we should expect correspondence between the findings presented here and what has been discussed in the rest of the thesis;
- H₃: given H₁, Central Asian states have used the international stage to act in concert to address several problems in their own region;
- H₄: given H₁ and H₃, Central Asian states present themselves as a coherent regional group in world politics. This should be especially true for the 1990s, when the Central Asian international society was structured as a dead-letter solidarist international society, and disproved after the mid-2000s, when the regional environment became more and more coexistential/pluralistic.

To verify these hypotheses, this chapter sets the task of analysing the present state of the behaviour of Central Asian states within the UN, in particular within the General Assembly (UNGA), thus in line with recent literature discussing 'regional positionality' on international issues (Luif 2003, Hosli et al. 2010, Häge and Hug 2013, Bailey et al. 2013, Strezhnev and Voeten 2013, Burmester and Jankowski 2014,

Ferdinand 2014).

This is for multiple reasons. Firstly, all Central Asian states are members of the UNGA, and therefore an extensive analysis of their normative stances is possible.

Secondly, they are not members of the Security Council or of other voting institutions; when this happens, such as membership of Turkmenistan in the ECOSOC or of Kazakhstan in the Council of Human Rights, the other Central Asian republics are not represented, and therefore an analysis of the whole group of states is not possible.

Thirdly, if the aim is to highlight and disclose the normative orientation of Central Asian states in world politics, shedding light on their attitude on normative issues with respect to problems of world governance, then the UNGA can be seen as the main arena where normative positions are held, explained, contrasted and challenged (Kim and Russett 1996). As a global deliberating body, the Assembly appears to be 'well suited to discussing the general principles and norms that do or should govern international relations' (Peterson 1986: 259). The deliberative process of the UNGA is 'a process of distributing desired symbolic and material values among members of society' (Peterson 1986: 7).

Furthermore, considering the already noted trend in the literature, votes in the UNGA have become 'the standard data source for constructing measures of state preferences as they are comparable and observable actions taken by many countries at set points in time' (Bailey et al. 2013: 1). In sum, the UNGA, like all other international organisations, is one of the elements that affect the process of world politics by providing the norms and institutions within which states and other actors interact in pursuit of their various goals (Peterson 1986: 5; Luif 2003: 13). Even if (or perhaps exactly because) resolutions are not binding, and are rather indications, suggestions, manifestation of the world's *Zeitgeist* in a particular moment on a particular issue of world politics, the vote and the justification for that vote are important harbingers of what norms, beliefs and rules a country, or a group of countries, abides by.

6.2 The analysis of words and votes in the GA: a worthy exercise?

In one of the best discussions on the utility of analysing voting behaviour within the UNGA, Robert Keohane has addressed the important point of supporting an analysis

of voting behaviour of states with the political processes of negotiations and tit-for-tat behind the scenes to substantiate the meaning of votes themselves (Keohane 1967). According to him, a single vote or group of votes cannot speak for itself, and rarely are variables *per se*. More often, if not always, votes within the UNGA are the output results of endless negotiations, meetings, challenges, agreements and disagreements in the rooms behind the curtain, where states put their cards on the table and play according to their will, whether following their mere interest (in supporting, balancing on rejecting a given resolution) or following a normative commitment: ‘Important as the understanding of individual and group voting behaviour undoubtedly is, such analysis does not provide us with comprehensive knowledge of General Assembly politics’ (Keohane 1967: 221; see also Kissack 2007). His target were those scholars who employed statistical techniques to simply find correlation between group composition and voting outcomes, without being interested in why certain groups supported (opposed) a given resolution or how that support (opposition) was created and sustained.

On this point, I agree with Keohane that a mere binomial correlation between states and votes does not demonstrate much. This is why, for the purpose of this chapter, I conducted preliminary research to find those press conferences and bilateral meetings where heads of states stressed the need to continue to cooperate within international institutions and the UN in particular that may be a sign of consultations and discussion on common positions to adopt within the UNGA (Avesta 2013a; KazInform 2012; KazInform 2013; Trend 2012c; Trend 2013; UzDaily 2012b; UzDaily 2012c).²⁶¹

In addition, this chapter adopts the use of speeches and declarations of political leaders as its method to give a tentative framework of discussion and consultation where to put the statistical component of voting behaviour in the UNGA. This move can also serve to reduce methodological biases deriving from ‘chance voting’, i.e. voting convergence driven by chance rather than by coordination (Häge 2011).

However, while Keohane focuses on impact, and on how small states may influence the outcome of a resolution, in this chapter I focus more on what a vote in the UNGA *signifies from a mere normative viewpoint*, in full line with the ES

261 I also came to know about dialogue and consultation in UN bodies between Central Asian states through personal communications with official Uzbek sources in Tashkent.

approach adopted since the beginning. As a matter of fact, it is assumed that to vote for a specific resolution or on a specific theme is not only a reflection of a state's interests, but it may well represent a support/endorsement for a given norm/rule in international relations as well. This is particularly true for small states and newly independent states, which having the advantage of holding the majority in the UNGA may oppose and contest norms that would hinder their development, infringe on their sovereignty and silence their cultural peculiarities.

In sum, while there is awareness that the UNGA 'is not a comprehensive reflection of the full range of foreign policy concerns of all states, or of the balance of priorities of individual states, [...] voting cohesion there is still a very good indicator of common positions on the widest range of *global* issues' (Ferdinand 2014: 3, emphasis added).

Since in this chapter the stress is more on norms and rules rather than on material capabilities and physical dynamics of world politics and the intent is to show, to the extent that it is possible, the normative convergence of Central Asian states in the UNGA, being consistent with the rest of the thesis I deem that to make use of ES categories of international society, pluralism, solidarism and institutions is a convenient move to grasp the complexities of Central Asian behaviour in the Assembly.

I decided to maintain this theoretical framework also in this chapter because, as said, I mean to shed light on two related aspects of Central Asian international politics, if at the global level (and not at the regional one any more): whether the mainly competitive nature of regional politics is reflected also at the international level, and, if not, what the norms shared among them are (whether pluralist or solidarist). Having traced the evolution of the Central Asian international society from solidarism (1990s) to pluralism (2000s), the chapter expects to find the same developments at the international level as well.

The ES, being a *via media* between realism and liberalism, allows us to focus on this relational, normative dimension of international relations while not dispensing with the mainly non-cooperative behaviour at the regional level. This would then contribute to the literature on regional cooperation dealt with in the introduction, as it would focus on a peculiar situation: cooperation and normative convergence at the global level but poor record of mutual understanding regionally. An ES reading of

Central Asia's attitude in the UNGA, therefore, allows to consider those norms and institutions that inform the international relations of Central Asian states, discloses the perspective that Central Asian states have on global international society and offers an alternative view on why, despite their poor record of regional cooperation and indeed growing competition, these states have managed so far to coexist in their regional space.

In addition, and no less importantly, the attempt of this chapter to apply an ES reading on Central Asia expands a new theoretical agenda that has been inaugurated only very recently (Costa Buranelli 2014c, Kaczmarska 2013, Pourchot and Stivachtis 2014).

6.3 Methodology and methods

The next step to make is to determine the right methodology and methods to disclose the presumed normative convergence in the UNGA and, therefore, at the international level. In line with an ES approach, I opted for a qualitative, interpretive analysis of two kinds of sources (Navari 2009).

The first are the official documents from 1992 to 2012 retrieved from the UN online archives and web databases submitted by Central Asian governments, alone or in common, to the UN, whether to the Secretariat or to the UNGA directly.

The second is the whole array of declarations, speeches, interviews, press-conferences and addresses made by Central Asian government representatives within the UN itself, where the intention to abide by specific norms and institutions of international society is advocated by the speakers (on behalf of the state they represent) during general debates and/or inaugural speeches. Due to space constraints, here I analyse the discourses of Central Asian statesmen for the last four years only (2011-2014). Dealing with these two kinds of sources, I code those terms, phrases and expressions that signal, contain or simply make reference to a specific norm or institution of international society.

Yet, in order to substantiate my claims and to strengthen the validation of the hypotheses set above, in this chapter I tried to engage in a triangulation of methods opting for a multi-method research (Mason 1996: 25, 42). Methodologically speaking, this is a (hopefully) valuable departure from the main qualitative route set at the beginning of the thesis, and followed since then. While the first two groups of sources

are scrutinised in a qualitative way, I have also adopted a quantitative analysis of a third group of sources, which is the similarity of positions in the UNGA among nations expressed in votes on a single issue over time, from 1992 to 2012. To analyse this third group of sources, I relied on the Index of Affinity of Nations (Strezhnev and Voeten 2013). This index calculates the similarity of positions among nations within the UNGA, posing it on a (0-1) scale, where '0' represents the greatest disagreement and where '1' represents the highest agreement and convergence.

The added value of integrating the qualitative strategies adopted in this paper with this quantitative tool is the possibility to verify that the normative convergence of Central Asian states is expressed not just on paper and verbally, but is also translated in documented outcomes. The multi-perspective corroboration of the hypothesis, at least in this chapter, was thus sought via an integrative, multi-faceted methodology based on interpretivism and descriptive statistical correlation.

While the use of such a quantitative technique may not fit well in a paper that claims to follow an ES approach to sustain its claims, I believe there is nothing that *a priori* prevents the mixing of methods to present more nuanced and more rounded conclusions (Greener 2011; 6 and Bellamy 2011). As a matter of fact, while relying on mere qualitative analysis would prevent me from verifying *how* and *to what extent* this convergence is played out in the UNGA, the mere quantitative aspect would prevent me from knowing on *what* norms there is convergence. This is why I endorse a multi-method analysis to disclose possible normative isonomy among Central Asian states in the UNGA.

With respect to the last, quantitative part, it should be noted that contrary to Peter Ferdinand (2014) I employ only one index of convergence, and not three. This is because this chapter does not intend to be a quantitative analysis of voting convergence. Rather, one of its aims is to show a perhaps less precise but more rounded picture of normative convergence among Central Asian states, and therefore deems appropriate to be methodologically extensive and not intensive. In addition, I am aware that the use of these different methods does not provide a perfect picture of the normative convergence of Central Asian states within the UNGA, and some problems are still left out. These problems, however, will be dealt with in the conclusion, and will certainly (and hopefully) represent opportunities for further research.

The chapter is structured as follows: in the first section, I offer a brief historical account on how Central Asian states joined the UN. Subsequently, I scrutinise and analyse the norms endorsed and supported in the official documents submitted to the UNGA by Central Asian states as a group. Therefore, in this section I will also focus on the ‘regionness’ of Central Asia, meant as the ability to act on the world stage as a coherent group of states capable of acting in concert and presenting a common identity to the world over the years. This section, in sum, will offer a collective overview on their normative convergence. In the next section, conversely, I will offer a discrete overview of their normative convergence. I code declarations and speeches of each Central Asian state-representative to see what norms are adopted and embraced by singular leaders. As it can be expected, the hypotheses listed above will be validated if both the collective and the discrete overview will bring the same results. In the fourth section, I make a quantitative shift, and I discuss the normative convergence of Central Asian states in voting sessions in the UNGA to verify if this convergence is also sustained at the decisional level. In the conclusions, I discuss the findings of the research presented in this chapter and the position of Central Asia in the global international society.

6.4 Central Asia joins the UN – A Brief History

The early 1990s were a period of intensive turmoil in the geopolitical area covered by the USSR; the Gorbachev experiment of reforming communism while retaining it, did not stop the wave of protests and dissent across the Soviet territories. With the USSR on the verge of dissolution, many attempts were made to retain a sort of confederal structure that allowed the republics to be sovereign while being formally part of the Soviet superstructure (Kulchik et al. 1996, Hiro 2009).

The Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan were clearly the least willing to see the Soviet Union dissolve: being the least developed republics and the main supplier of raw materials to the core of the centralised, planned economic system, a disruption of the unified system would wreak havoc, and would leave them unprepared for a life as independent countries, something they had never been. Nonetheless, Central Asian governments agreed that a greater degree of autonomy from Moscow was desirable, especially in economic matters.

Thus, following the general trend, the Soviet Central Asian republics declared their sovereignty as Soviet Socialist Republics, giving pre-eminence to national laws over Soviet ones but still remaining within the USSR framework. Uzbekistan declared its sovereignty in October 1990, Turkmenistan in August 1990, Kazakhstan in September 1990, Kyrgyzstan in October 1990 and Tajikistan in August 1990. However, already in June 1990, the Central Asian republics plus Kazakhstan had already started consulting each other on economic coordination, cooperation and reciprocal consultation, signing agreements on economic matters and setting up a consultative council to analyse future prospects of cooperation (Hiro 2009).

In terms of participation in international organisations, there were rumours at that time that the Soviet Union, still alive, was planning a sort of re-Ukrainisation or re-Belarusisation of the UN, proposing to have seats for each sovereign republic while retaining the USSR seat in the Security Council, a new ‘X-matter’, to use Stettinius’ expression.²⁶² Between the declaration of sovereignty and the final demise of the Soviet Union, as a matter of fact, there was still the possibility that Moscow would retain a major control on the more ‘sovereign’ activities of those republics, among them the management of foreign affairs.

Central Asians’ willingness and desires notwithstanding, the Soviet Union fell apart in December 1991 and, in prevision of this, the Central Asian republics had declared their independence as sovereign states, as we saw in Chapter 4.

Aware of the fragility of their new-born international status, however, all five Central Asian republics sought to enhance and entrench their sovereignty on the *de jure* side, by formally applying to the UN to gain international legitimacy and recognition as sovereign states. In a surprisingly quick adaptation to the institutional environment of world politics and showing steady knowledge of the instruments of international law, the five newly independent states submitted a letter to the Secretary-General in full compliance with Rule 134 of the Rules of Procedures of the UNGA.²⁶³ Such letters, then, would be submitted from the Secretary-General to the

262 Edward Stettinius, US Secretary of States at Dumbarton Oaks (August 1944), used to refer to the Soviet proposal of having a Soviet seat in the Security Council plus 16 seats for each Soviet republic as the ‘X-matter’. A compromise was reached in Yalta (1945) with the admission for the Soviet Union, Ukraine and Belarus as founding members.

263 The full procedure to admit a new member state to the UN is a combination of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and of the Security Council, linked by the Secretary General. It is the following: a letter containing a formal application and a formal commitment to accepting all the obligations contained in the Charter should be sent to the Secretary-General (Rule 134 GA); the

Security Council for a preliminary scrutiny, which would be ratified in a second phase by the UNGA with a two-thirds majority vote.

The application was extremely quick: Kazakhstan sent his letter already on 31 December 1991, so in the same month in which it gained full independence (S/23353); Kyrgyzstan on 6 January 1992 (S/23450); Uzbekistan sent its letter on the same day as Kyrgyzstan (S/23451); Tajikistan sent its letter on 16 January 1992 (S/23455), while Turkmenistan applied formally on 20 January 1992 (S/23489 and Corr. 1). On March 2, 1992, all the five Central Asian states completed their procedure of admission to the UN, being accepted as full members with unanimous votes of the General Assembly at its 82nd plenary meeting (Kazakhstan 46/224; Kyrgyzstan 46/225; Uzbekistan 46/226; Tajikistan 46/228; Turkmenistan 46/229).

Before concluding this section, a short digression on the nature of their admission is in order to fully grasp the importance that such an admission played for the newly independent states.

After diplomatic and legal negotiations within the UNSC, the Russian Federation was accorded the right to take over the Soviet seat, and the other former members of the USSR were allowed to apply for their own membership. The Central Asian states, having signed the Commonwealth Accord in December 1991, agreed that Russia would take USSR's seat in the Security Council, but also insisted on their right to apply to the UN as independent states (Scharf 1995: 45). From a legal perspective, the 'new states' of Central Asia were subject only to customary law with respect to State succession involving new states (Mullerson 1993: 474). Therefore, due to the Soviet Union having 'officially ceased to exist' and former SSRs' internal, federal administrative borders having been recognised as international borders by the international community (Rich 1993),²⁶⁴ the Central Asian states were therefore

Secretary-General presents the application to the Security Council, which sends it to the Committee for the Admission of New States (Rule 59 SC); the Security Council decides whether the State under scrutiny is a peace-loving one and ready to fulfil its obligations under the UN Chart and, if the outcome is positive, passes its recommendation over to the General Assembly (Rule 60 SC); following the Security Council's recommendation, the General Assembly votes with two-thirds of its members the admission of the new State (Rule 136 GA). If the outcome is positive, the Secretary General informs the Applicant State with the decision of the General Assembly (Rule 138 GA).

²⁶⁴ The same recognition of internal frontiers as international borders (based on the *uti possidetis* principle) was applied to the former Yugoslav Republics (Opinion 3 of the Badinter Arbitration Committee), whose path to recognition was nonetheless less straightforward, more debated and legally not customary due to the strict criteria imposed by the European Community (Weller 1992: 587-590).

obliged to go through the usual procedures of application for membership (Blum 1992: 832).

According to the rules of procedures and to the requisites for states to become members of the UN (see Article 4(1) of the Charter and Rule 60 of the SC Rules), an applicant must: 1) be a state according to international law; 2) be peace-loving; 3) accept the obligations of the Charter;²⁶⁵ 4) be able to carry out those obligations and 5) be willing to do so. For the UN, the main criterion to define a prospective member as a 'state' was statehood as defined by the Montevideo Convention (article 2, 1933).

However, if the main criterion for UN admission was statehood according to international law and the capacity of applicant states to implement the provisions prescribed in the Charter and to guarantee peace and security, then the newly independent Central Asian republics barely met those standards.²⁶⁶

As noticed in Chapter 4, none of them had previous experience not just of independence, but even of formal diplomatic relations. In addition, the economic system, once tied to Moscow, was now completely disrupted, none of them had an independent, state-led military and borders were very porous and feeble, although all the five state leaders agreed to adopt the *uti possidetis* principle and to not alter the geographical spatial configuration of the republics. The already noted inter-ethnic frictions in the region, such as those among Uzbeks and Mekshetian Turks in 1989 and Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in 1990 in Osh, as well as tensions among Tajiks and Kyrgyzs and between Russian and Kazakhs in northern Kazakhstan left few hopes for a peaceful transition.

Then, why did the UN bestow membership on them? Following O'Keefe on the ex-Yugoslav states (2001), I argue that the UN gave priority to the peaceful process of independence that realised the statehood of these states and that, on the

265 For example, in the request for admission from the Kazakh government we can read 'on behalf of the republic of Kazakhstan and as head of state, I [Nazarbayev] have the honour to submit the present application for membership in the UN' and that Kazakhstan 'accepts the obligations contained in the charter of the UN and solemnly undertakes to discharge them' (Xinhua News Agency, 2 Jan 1992). President Niyazov of Turkmenistan added that being admitted to the UN was 'a matter of priority' and, to stress the independent character of his country, wrote down the percentages of the referendum on independence held on October 27, 1991 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 21 Jan 1992).

266 A good example of this is that it was the Russian Ambassador Yuli Vorontsov who delivered to the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali the requests of admission from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

other hand, it believed that an entrenchment of a *de jure* sovereignty could have pacified the *de facto* political environment in Central Asia. Thus, potential irredentist claims, inter-ethnic feuds, border skirmishes would have been framed as conflicts among full sovereign states, and thus incorporated in all those rules and procedures that serve to regulate conflict among states and to bring order to potentially disruptive situations. The criterion was therefore a relaxation of the interpretation of full and active statehood, in order to satisfy the higher requirement of international peace and security.

The rationale was that, although tenuous and weak, these states were legally independent, as they were no longer republics of a non-existent federation. The maintenance of peace and security thus had a sort of constitutional primacy in their admission. What we observe is therefore a flexible approach to the formal criteria that we find in Article 4(1) of the Charter motivated by legal, but also by *political* and *security* reasons. We can read their admission as a way of the UN to achieve and entrench order in the post-Cold War period. Thus, the fact that independence was achieved peacefully was a good point for the new states, as well as for the UN. To paraphrase Hersch Lauterpacht, the admission of post-Soviet space states was more permeated with law and principle than is currently assumed (Lauterpacht 2012).

After 2 March 1992, all five Central Asian presidents started engaging with the organisation they were new members of, striving for visibility in the new international context. In the light of what said above, it is therefore not surprising that the Central Asian states plus Russia first approached the UN with a legal document concerning the already encountered *uti possidetis* provision with respect to their borders. The Declaration on the Inviolability of Frontiers was submitted to both the UNGA and the Security Council immediately one year after admission to the UN, thus to legitimise and ‘sanctify’ the territorial aspect of the newly gained sovereignty (A/48/304 and S/26290, 11 August 1993).

6.5 Normative convergence in UN Documents submitted by Central Asian countries

The first examples of normative convergence and societal attitude among the five Central Asian states date back to the mid-1990s and the end of that period, when the CAU was still alive (1994-1998). Despite the already noted neglect of the literature on

the matter, that period and that experience proved to be significant in terms of defining and sharpening the normative directions of Central Asia in world politics.

For example, in the document 'Towards a Culture of Peace' (A/52/558 31 October 1997), the five Central Asian governments presented a roadmap of how, according to them, international relations should be conducted. References to multiculturalism and pluralism (§ 6: 'We are unanimously of the view that mankind's cultural diversity is an essential prerequisite for the maintenance of alternative paths to the further development of mankind' and § 13: 'The meaning of civilization is multiculturalism. This is the only acceptable and realistic idea of the present and the future. The cultures of small peoples are equal and irreproducible in their unique distinctiveness and the multiplicity of their hues'), sovereignty equality (§ 7: 'to devise a new world order in which, on the basis of equality of rights and mutual respect, account would be taken of the interests of all peoples'), international law and diplomacy (Annex II: 'The development of bilateral inter-State relations on the basis of the norms of international law has become a guarantee of the successful conduct of [our] policy') were endorsed and reiterated.

One year later, in the A/53/62 Document, the five Central Asian states reaffirmed their normative convergence on the world stage professing strongly pluralist values and norms. For example, the values and institutions of sovereignty, non-interference, international law and diplomatic resolution of conflicts take a whole paragraph of the document:

Reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, desiring to deepen the ties among their countries and peoples on the basis of the principles of respect for independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, equality, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, rejection of the use of force or threat of force and rejection of economic or any other means of exerting pressure, conscientious fulfilment of their obligations, and compliance with the universally recognized norms of international law.

At the same time, the institution of GPM is evident in the five states' assessment of the Afghan peaceful settlement: '[the sides] reaffirmed their readiness to continue their joint efforts to settle the situation in Afghanistan under the auspices of the UN, with the participation of neighbouring countries, the Russian Federation and the

United States of America'. In addition, the regional identity of Central Asia²⁶⁷ was entrenched and enhanced, signalling that all regional states adhered to those norms and principles:

the leaders of the five States noted their States' enormous historical potential and common historical roots, the interrelatedness of their destinies, their traditions of friendship, the similarity of their cultures, customs and mores, and the stability of their good-neighbourly relations. [...] Bearing in mind the similarity of their goals and objectives with respect to the independent development of their countries, consolidation of their statehood, and their international recognition as full subjects of international law. [...] The sides unanimously noted the usefulness and timeliness of the Ashgabat meeting, which helped strengthen mutual understanding and confidence, and clarify positions on key issues concerning relations among the five fraternal countries.

Interestingly, however, application of the pluralist values of sovereignty equality, non-interference and coexistence are to be found in the region itself, especially when stressing

[Central Asian states'] determination to consolidate their political and economic independence and their unwavering commitment to deepening friendly, equitable and mutually advantageous relations based on a long-term partnership and consistent with the national interests of all five States, and to security and stability in the region.

In a third document, the A/53/96,²⁶⁸ which followed the Tashkent Declaration signed on 26 March 1998, the parties emphasised once more the value of sovereignty and non-interference ('[we] regard the integration of the States of Central Asia as a natural and objective process which is conditioned and determined by the vital interests of each country'), of international law as the main and indeed only mean of communication among nations (exemplified by the long list of agreements made and by their commitment '[t]o ensure the strict implementation of the joint agreements adopted [in the region]') plus the common references to peaceful coexistence and fraternal ties (which would imply a commitment to diplomacy when dealing with potential interstate conflicts and disagreements). Also in this case, the construction

267 Already one year earlier Uzbek Foreign Minister Kamilov stated that 'We [Uzbeks] continue to believe that Central Asia has its own characteristics'; he also made reference to a 'regional identity', although he did not explain what he meant (A/51/PV.21).

268 Letter dated 9 April 1998 from the Permanent Representatives of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to the UN.

and the perpetuation of a concrete regional coherence are visible:

On the basis of the common history and culture of their peoples, the Heads of State of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. [...] They regard the integration of the States of Central Asia as a natural and objective process. [...] [The parties] emphasize that they would also welcome the participation of Turkmenistan in a form acceptable to it. [...] The Presidents declare their firm resolve to do everything possible to strengthen eternal friendship and cooperation between the peoples of Central Asia, which are in conformity with their vital interests.

Already from this short analysis of principles endorsed by Central Asian states, the interrelationship between norms and regional context is notable, as well as between norms and regional identity: in the words and minds of State leaders, Central Asia was a coherent, convergent and distinct region of world politics. Interestingly, these international stances are in line with what we observed in Chapter 4, when it was shown how Central Asia was a solidarist regional international society (if of the dead-letter type).

The trend of normative and regional convergence did not stop with new millennium, but actually received more impetus with the setting up of the CACO (2002-2006). In the document A/57/614-S/2002/1246,²⁶⁹ for example, we find a clear common commitment to the preservation and implementation of pluralist values in international relations within the region. Central Asian states are said to be

Guided by their common interest in promoting the stability, security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all the States of the region and in strengthening cooperation between the States of the region in areas of common interest.

At § 5 we find also a commitment to the norm of environmentalism:

The Heads of State emphasize the need for increased cooperation in the area of the protection and enhancement of the environment, the prevention of transboundary pollution, and the prevention of natural and technogenic disasters in the States of the region and the elimination of their consequences,

paired with the intention to abide by the prescriptions and dictates of international law:

269 Letter dated 14 November 2002 from the Permanent Representatives of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to the UN.

[the States] reaffirm the need for coordinated and concerted action in that area on the basis of the generally recognized principles and rules of international law.

As in other documents, however, the use and validity of international law is reinforced by that of protection of borders and sovereignty, § 7:

The Heads of State emphasized the importance of the speedy completion, on the basis of the rules and principles of international law, of the process of the legal establishment of the State border lines between their States as a basic element of the sovereignty and independence of States.

Such principles are also recalled in the Dushanbe Declaration, annexed to the document itself. There, we find again support for the rules of diplomacy and coexistence in interstate relations: ‘taking into account the interests of all the countries of the region and in compliance with the principles of good-neighbourliness and mutual respect’. Regional coherence is also reaffirmed: the signatories present themselves as ‘The Presidents of the States of Central Asia — the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan’.

In 2003, the Joint statement by the heads of State of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan was submitted to the UNGA and the Secretariat (A/58/131–S/2003/703). Again, the usual pluralist norms of coexistence, limited and short-term cooperation and respect for sovereignty and international law are professed, while clearly identifying themselves as a region. As a matter of fact, the Heads of State addressed ‘the questions of developing multilateral regional cooperation within the framework of the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO), the situation in and around the region’, thus creating a divide between them, Central Asians, and the external realm. Indeed, one should never forget that the fact that these documents submitted to the UN were also an attempt to gain international recognition as a group.²⁷⁰

Again, what we observe is a correspondence between the regional events we traced and analysed in Chapter 5 and what is supported and professed at the international level *synchronically*. In fact, it should be recalled that in the first years of

270 For a discussion of ‘recognition of regions’ at the international level, see Ong (2012).

the new millennium, Central Asian states still did have a regional impetus to cooperate, even if on more and sharper pluralist grounds, emphasising more and more the national interest over the common identity of the region.

Yet, we saw that towards the end of the first decade of the new millennium the five Central Asian states lost any sense of regional grouping, being without a Central Asian regional organisation representing them. In parallel with the already noted entry of Russia in the region,²⁷¹ pristine animosities especially on border issues, water and energy resources, old divides and mutual distrust among the leaders of the republics prevented them from presenting themselves on the world stage as 'Central Asia' as we saw above. Nonetheless, while the regional convergence decreased in centripetal form, normative convergence, especially around the pluralist normative bulk of the region, has remained present.

Especially in the field of security and nuclear non-proliferation, the Central Asian states have been successful in using the UN as a rostrum from where they could prove to be able to successfully bargain matters related to their survival, even proposing themselves as an example for other regions to the world.

The formal setting up for the CANWFZ, as it will be recalled, started already in 1997. In the Statement issued at Tashkent on 15 September 1997 by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, then submitted to the UN (A/52/390), the states agreed to sign a treaty instituting the CANWFZ, following their common commitment to sovereignty equality, use of diplomacy and international law as means for peaceful coexistence and stressing those rules facilitating security maintenance and survival among nations.

The process of setting up the CANWFZ lasted more than ten years (other significant documents have been 2005: A/59/733–S/2005/155; 2009: A/63/782; 2012: A/67/409). The UN hailed the normative convergence of the Central Asian states in the realm of non-proliferation and disarmament, declaring that the Treaty on a NWFZ in Central Asia, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region, constituted an important step towards strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime and ensuring regional and international peace and security (A/67/409).

271 After joining CACO in 2004, Russia merged CACO with EurAsEC (Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan) at the St. Petersburg Summit of 2005, de facto silencing the only Central Asian regional organisation then still alive.

In the press conference following the adoption of the CANWFZ Treaty, Nurbek Jeenbaev (Kyrgyzstan) stated that the five countries had reached their agreement out of a desire to promote regional and international peace and security; Aksoltan T. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) said that, while each of the five nations had its own identity, they also shared a common history, and Murad Askarov (Uzbekistan) added that the signing and quick entry into force of the Treaty was also a clear indication that all five countries were fully aware of their role in maintaining international security and contributing to a more stable world.²⁷²

Thus, even at a time when Central Asian countries were not supported by (and, perhaps more importantly, *decided to not support* any more) regional projects specifically ‘Central Asian’, these states were able to find an agreement and to meet each other’s interests following the pluralist norms of coexistence exemplified by sovereignty protection, international law and diplomacy. This, again, is in line with what has been extensively discussed in Chapter 5.

6.6 Speeches and norms

This section addresses the norms professed by each Central Asian state in the UNGA in the last two years via direct speech. As we have noted, there are no longer any Central Asian regional organisations and therefore each Central Asian state on the stage speaks only for itself and not on behalf of the regional group. However, the analysis shows that while the regional convergence lowered significantly, the *normative* convergence remains high. For the purpose of the chapter and indeed of the thesis, the difference is crucial. As anticipated, methodologically speaking I will rely on the twenty speeches made at the UNGA Plenary Meeting by the five Central Asian representatives from 2011 to 2014. I proceed in reversed order, and start from 2014.

In the 69th General Debate in the UNGA, Kazakhstan was represented by its Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov (2014). He stressed the role of international law in resolving disputes (‘we are confident that the Charter of the United Nations and the fundamental principles of international law provide the basis for [peace]’, the privilege accorded to disarmament and non-proliferation norms in the region (with

²⁷² States News Service, 30 March 2009.

several references to the CANFWZ), the presence of environmentalism as an institution adopted by his country ('sustainable development is central to Kazakhstan's ambitions for the future') and he also made reference to Central Asia as a region. Importantly, he also proposed the creation of a 'regional hub' in Almaty, complementary to UNRCCA, which would serve as diplomatic platform for Central Asian governments.

Erlan Abdyldayev, Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan, emphasised similar norms and institutions (environmentalism in particular, with several references to the Millennium Development Goals). Plus, he made an interesting reference to what in Chapter 5 has been defined 'multilateral bilateralism', mentioning how standing issues between Central Asian countries are being resolved through a subsequent series of bilateral agreements among states (2014).

Kokhir Rasulzoda, Prime Minister of Tajikistan, made references to environmental norms as well (2014), while Rashid Meredov, Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan, insisted on diplomacy ('the peaceful resolution of these conflicts must be achieved by diplomatic approaches'), international law, disarmament and non-proliferation ('we believe that it will be useful to consider the establishment of a United Nations subregional disarmament centre in Central Asia'), references to Central Asia and to 'mechanisms' operating between regional countries to ensure stability ('we propose that serious consideration be given to the idea of convening a forum on security and cooperation in Central Asia under the auspices of the United Nations as a starting platform for further work in this area'), and to GPM as understood by Central Asian states, i.e. operating not regionally but internationally ('The Security Council is called on to assume a special responsibility') (2014).

Finally, Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov emphasised environmentalism, diplomacy, sovereignty and non-interference. References to Central Asia as a region were also made (2014).

One year earlier, in 2013 (68th General Debate), the representative of Kazakhstan was Idrissov again. And again, he emphasised the same norms and institutions, stressing in particular international law ('Kazakhstan is committed to the fundamental principles of international law') and disarmament/non-proliferation, mentioning also the fact that Kazakhstan 'welcomes the willingness of the five permanent members of the Security Council to hold a dialogue on the Additional Protocol with the five countries in the zone and to provide negative assurances as

soon as possible' (2013).

Kyrgyzstan was, again, represented by Erlan Abdyldayev. He once more stressed environmental, diplomatic and legal norms by making references to the authority of the UN in international affairs, and made references to Central Asia as a 'region' as well (2013).

This time, Tajikistan was represented by its Prime Minister Aqil Aqilov. Once more, environmental norms and the role of the UN in ensuring peace and stability globally were recognised (2013).

Rashid Meredov represented Turkmenistan also in 2013. He made references to diplomacy and international law ('at the heart of Turkmenistan's policies is the will to resolve any situation by peaceful, political and diplomatic ways and means, which it considers to be the main legitimate resources available within the United Nations'), to sovereignty, to environmentalism ('our country would like to launch an initiative aimed at the establishment of a specialized entity, a subregional centre on technologies relating to climate change in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea basin') and to Central Asia as a region. In particular, Meredov mentioned the possibility of creating a permanent regional forum to contribute 'to the elaboration of consensus-based approaches to finding solutions to the most important issues relating to the present and future development of Central Asia and its neighbouring regions'. Moreover, 'the forum could become the basis for the establishment of a consultative council of the Heads of State of Central Asia' (2013).

Finally, Uzbekistan emphasised the norms of sovereignty, diplomacy, international law and environmentalism through its Foreign Minister, Kamilov (2013).

Dealing now with the 67th General Debate in the UNGA, 2012, the first speaker was Foreign Minister Kairat Umarov for Kazakhstan (2012). In his speech he emphasised Kazakhstan's commitment to security, reform of the UN System in favour of reinforced sovereign equality ('multipolarity...trust and political tolerance'), non-proliferation ('Kazakhstan fully supports the proposal by the UN Secretary-General to adopt a nuclear weapons convention'), international law and diplomacy ('new principles [...] should be enshrined in [...] the entire international law system; we call upon the Governments to adhere to their international obligations to protect diplomatic representatives in their countries'), non-interference ('we believe that it is fundamentally important to ensure strict adherence to the principle of non-interference

in international affairs of States’).

Other norms and institutions mentioned were sovereignty (‘[t]he principles of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs must be respected’) and environmentalism (‘Kazakhstan will actively promote the development of a project of sustainable development goals’).

The second speaker was Asylbek Jeenbekov, Speaker of the Kyrgyz Parliament (2012). He made reference to respect and inviolability of international law (stressing ‘commitment to international legal obligations [in international relations]’), more equitable order, protocols of diplomacy (‘we also reject the use of force against diplomats of every country’), non-intervention (‘Kyrgyzstan is advocating an open international dialogue between the forces [in Syria]’), and GPM. Furthermore, there were references to reform of the UN to strengthen sovereign equality (‘reform of the UN is still a priority’), sovereignty (‘one can clearly see the sanctity of our fatherland’) and more equitable and democratic order (‘we propose to expand the membership of the UNSC to make it more representative, transparent and democratic’), as well as environmentalism (‘Kyrgyzstan made its choice of its future route towards long term sustainable green development and green economy’).

For Tajikistan spoke its Foreign Minister, Hamrokhon Zarifi (2012). We read about the importance of the UN (‘it is impossible to address global and regional issues without strengthening the central role of the UN’), reform of its system (‘it is necessary to carry out a rational reform of the Organisation’), sovereignty, pluralism (‘Tajikistan is convinced that respect for cultural and religious diversity...is essential for global peace and understanding’), non-interference, international law (‘it is necessary to behave according to international treaties’), environmentalism (‘in Tajikistan special attention is given to effective, rational and protective use of natural resources that constitute the main dimension of the “green economy”’).

In addition there were references to norms of good neighbourhood, diplomacy, *pacta sunt servanda* (‘we expect...parties in the region will abstain from hasty and not thoroughly thought out statements and actions that can run counter to the existing international agreements and spirit of friendship, cooperation and good neighbourhood’).

The Turkmen representative, Rashid Meredov (2012), made reference to environmentalism (‘The UN Conference on Sustainable Development “Rio +20” held in June this year clearly identified the need to consolidate efforts on ecological issues

and environmental protection') and international law ('Turkmenistan seeks to act in accordance with international law and the resolutions of the UNGA').

Finally, the Uzbek speaker Abdulaziz Kamilov (Kamilov 2012) followed on the same lines on non-intervention and sovereignty ('the problems of Central Asia must be addressed by the countries of the region without interference of external powers'), international law ('we are deeply convinced that all issues and energy problematic in our region [...] must be considered in line with universally recognized norms of international law [...] Uzbekistan calls on to be guided by these principles and norms') and a pluralist vision of world order ('Uzbekistan proceeds from addressing all outstanding political, economic and ecological problems of the region on the basis of mutual consideration of interests, constructive dialogue and norms of international law').

Finally, moving to 2011, we see that some of the protagonists have changed, but again the discourses of State representatives are not different from the other years considered.

This time, the Kazakh speaker was the president himself, Nursultan Nazarbayev (2011). Norms endorsed were non-proliferation ('we have become one of the world's first newly independent non-nuclear states'), environmentalism ('Kazakhstan has called for the adoption of a Global Energy and Environment Strategy and has put forward an ambitious "Green Bridge" environmental initiative'), sovereignty, non-intervention and international law ('the principle of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity is often exposed to erosion. [...] Today, it is essential to upgrade the norms of international law concerning the national sovereignty of States').

For the Kyrgyz Republic, the speaker was Roza Otunbayeva, the interim president (2011). She professed the values of democracy, which she considered a Kyrgyz peculiarity in a region populated by authoritarian states, but also those norms such as international law, non-intervention ('external intervention should remain a measure of the last resort and be used only and exclusively with the sanction of the UN Security Council'), diplomacy, environmentalism ('Kyrgyzstan is concerned with the decline of the world community's attention to the issues of global climate change'), non-proliferation as foundational norm of the region ('Kyrgyzstan as one of the initiators of creating a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in Central Asia and as the depositary of this treaty, which entered into force on 21 March 2009, considers

important the promptest entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and strengthening of the universality of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty'), plus references to Central Asia as a region, sovereignty, pluralist world order *passim*. The speaker for Tajikistan was, again, Zarifi (2011). He supported the institutions of diplomacy, sovereignty, market economy ('we believe that the system of international trade must remain open, fair, based on agreed upon rules, predictable and non-discriminatory. Guided by these principles, Tajikistan is currently holding negotiations on joining the World Trade Organization'), environmentalism ('it is widely known that in the second half of the 20th century the Central Asian region faced a severe ecological crisis that is degradation of the Aral Sea. It was irrational, careless and irresponsible use of the natural resources that caused actual death of the Aral Sea'), references to Central Asia as a region, international law, GPM, reform of the UN for a more equitable order ('It is impossible to address global issues and most urgent regional tasks without strengthening the UN system').

Another presidential figure present at the General Debate was Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov for Turkmenistan (2011). In one of his rare appearances on the world stage, he endorsed the norms of diplomacy ('Turkmenistan attaches paramount importance to the regulation of any situations by peaceful means and methods'), de-institutionalisation of war ('we absolutely reject military forces as an instrument of foreign policy and intergovernmental relations'), plus a declaration on priority introduction of political and diplomatic tools in solving international issues, references to Central Asia as a region (he advanced the proposal for an Advisory Council on peaceful development in Central Asia), reform of the economic order and environmentalism ('The environmental sphere is the priority direction of international cooperation of Turkmenistan').

The last speaker was Elyor Ganiev, Foreign Minister at that time (2011). He made reference to sovereignty ('in all 20 years passed since the time when the Republic of Uzbekistan became an independent state and joined the ranks of full-fledged members of the United Nations'), reference to Central Asia as a region ('the tragic events in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 became a serious challenge to peace and stability in the Central Asian region'),²⁷³ diplomacy ('there is no military solution to

273 The references to Central Asia as a region, even during its pluralist developments, show how despite the fact that Central Asia lost its 'actorness' (as a regional group) it still exists in the mind of statesmen as a 'potential region', as a field of closely interdependent relations. This was confirmed

the Afghan problem'), non-interference ('it is our firm belief that the Afghan people must resolve their country's problems on their own'), environmentalism ('the socio-economic development not only of our country but the entire Central Asian region is influenced by the environmental disaster of the Aral Sea'), international law ('any action on using the resources of transboundary rivers must take into account the interests of all states located in their basin and on the basis of international law'; 'the position of our country not only fully goes in line with the international law and the rules in this area [water-management], but not least, comes out of them'), multilateralism, at least at the global level ('Uzbekistan fully shares the importance of strengthening the multilateral mechanisms to ensure a stable and just world order').

What does all this reveal? Bringing together the various declarations of Central Asian state representatives made from the UNGA rostrum, it is possible to have a preliminary map, although certainly partial and imperfect, of their normative orientation in world politics.

They all seem to endorse all those norms and rules associated with a pluralist account of international society (sovereignty, non-interference, international law, diplomacy). In addition, speaking in ES terms, they all seem to advocate the institution of GPM, although sometimes this poses difficulties in matching it with the norm of non-intervention (as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan exemplify).²⁷⁴

Furthermore, all Central Asian states adopt a multicultural, pluralist and democratic vision of global order, rejecting the supremacy of the more developed countries at the expenses of the poorer ones, both in terms of resources and representation in institutional forums. Last but not least, all Central Asian states seem to endorse the principle of multilateralism in solving global issue, although this can be also seen as a derivative of their vision of international society as a pluralist environment. Unilateralism is explicitly rejected, and the role of the UN in ensuring multilateral arrangements in the security, economic and environmental fields is constantly stressed.

to me in all the interviews with experts, analysts, academics and diplomats that I conducted during my fieldwork.

274 We have noted already that in Central Asia there is a peculiar interpretation of GPM, which seems to be legitimate globally but not regionally.

Thus, even if Central Asian states no longer present themselves as a regional actor, they present a substantive degree of normative convergence, in some cases a real symmetry. And it is worth stressing again that there is correspondence between the international and the regional levels of analysis. The official speeches made in the period 2011-2014 reflect the strong pluralist environment identified and mapped in Chapter 5, with a strong emphasis on the Westphalian norms of sovereignty, international law and diplomacy. The question to ask now is: is this normative convergence empirically observable in the UNGA?

6.7 Votes and Convergence

This third and last section seeks to discover whether the normative convergence analysed and contextualised above is reflected in the voting practice in the UNGA. Before presenting the data, however, I need to specify some conditions, not last the method I use.

Firstly, I make clear that I look at those resolutions that 1) require a vote²⁷⁵ and 2) do not concern the organisational structure of the UN, but actually concern issues of world politics such as questions about sovereignty, nuclear weapons, economic order, environmental issues, peaceful settlements of conflicts, human rights and so forth.

Secondly, I consider each vote in the GA as a support/rejection for the norm and /or institution embodied in the resolution under debate. Although this move has been endorsed in the literature (Keohane 1967, Peterson 1986, more recently Puchala 2005, Boockmann and Dreher 2011, Voeten 2012),²⁷⁶ it may still require explanation. There is reason to believe that a vote can be linked to a normative stance especially given that 1) states are aware of the one-head-one-vote rule, and therefore are not tied to regional or global hegemons, and 2) most of the votes have a non-binding nature. Given that resolutions are not binding, therefore, states are more inclined to vote for what they deem to be right rather than for what they think may be useful.

275 Following Ferdinand (2014: 3), I do not consider resolutions adopted by consensus. This, however, is a very (methodologically speaking) sensitive issue in scholarship on UNGA voting. For a comprehensive analysis of the problem of 'consensus voting' in the UNGA, see Häge and Hug (2013).

276 Referring to votes on Human Rights, Boockmann and Dreher refer to the 'expressive nature' of voting in the UNGA as opposed to an 'instrumental' one (2011: 462).

We should also clarify the method adopted. As anticipated, I use the UNGA Voting Dataset, which contains also the Affinity of Nations scores (Strezhnev and Voeten 2013). To calculate the degree of convergence among Central Asian countries in the UNGA, I have used the variable ‘agree3un’ (Voting similarity index) using the interval (0-1) – computed using three categories of vote data (1 = ‘yes’; 2 = abstain, 3 = ‘no’).²⁷⁷ Abstention, therefore, is counted as half-agreement with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ vote. I considered the ‘agree3un’ variable since 1992 (first date available) and computed it for each dyad of Central Asian countries (10 dyads) and then calculated the mathematical average value for each dyad over the years. Detailed voting convergence data are in the appendix (see Appendix 5). However, in what follows I focus on the most striking similarities between the Central Asian countries.

Two possible objections may be made to this analysis. Firstly, one may argue that the normative convergence among Central Asian states is meaningless because they may share a high degree of convergence with other countries as well (on this point see, e.g., Stavridis and Pruet 1996: 4). Clearly Central Asian states share many concerns of their post-colonial peers in world politics (Ayoob 1995), and this is demonstrated, for example, by the fact that these states are sympathetic with the demands and normative stances of the Non-Aligned Movement (of which Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are members and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are observers). But this misses the point made at the beginning of the chapter, when it was stressed that given the present-day literature on the centrifugal character of the Central Asian region it was necessary to focus on the region itself to have more room for problematisation.

We should not forget that the focus of this chapter, and indeed this thesis, is specifically on the five Central Asian republics and on their convergence at their regional and international level. The fact that Central Asian states share a high degree of normative convergence with other states does not go against the fact that Central Asian states share a high degree of normative convergence *among themselves*, and this is particularly important since, as noted, they are usually considered in the literature as incapable of agreeing on most issues.

Secondly, there is the question of Great Powers. They may influence Central Asian states’ votes. To what extent do Central Asian states show normative

²⁷⁷ I follow Boockmann and Dreher (2011) in maintaining ‘abstention’ and ‘vote against’ as separated.

convergence with Russia and China, for example? On the utility of this question, the previous answer may still work. However, it is interesting to see that, while the data for China have not been computed yet, dyads with Russia show a statistically lower degree of agreement for all the five republics. Clearly we are in the realm of agreement and convergence, but figures are lower than among Central Asian states sometimes with significant (low) peaks (see Appendix 5). Task for future research, however, would be for example to understand and show on what issues the Central Asian republics and the former patron disagree the most (sovereignty and territorial integrity seem to be good candidates, as well as nuclear matters).²⁷⁸

For the 1992-2012 period, all dyads of Central Asian states show a high degree of convergence, with the highest value of 0.953 of Turkmenistan and Tajikistan and the lower one of 0.895 of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It is interesting to see how Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, commonly considered reciprocal foes in the region, have nonetheless quite a strong record of convergence (0.914 and 0.916 respectively), with indeed a rising trend over the last five years.

With respect to Russia, there is convergence as well, but less than among Central Asian states themselves (see Appendix 5). All values are below 0.88 on average, with significant low ebbs over the years (0.66 with Turkmenistan in 1996, a 0.70 with Kyrgyzstan in 1994 and a 0.68 with Uzbekistan in 1997). Perhaps not surprisingly, given their high dependence on military supply, security provision and economic investment, the two countries that enjoy the highest affinity with Russia are Kazakhstan and Tajikistan (0.86 and 0.87 respectively).

Going back to common voting behaviour among Central Asian states, recent examples of unanimity are to be found on equitable development (A/67/455 on Durban); sovereignty and auto-determination (A/67/456; A/61/442 on Palestine; A/67/444), matters concerning globalisation and cultural diversity (A/67/457/Add.2; A/66/462/Add.2); unilateral coercive measures in case of infringement of human rights (A/67/457/Add.2); right to development (A/67/457/Add.2; A/61/443/Add.2); equitable international order (A/67/457/Add.2; A/61/443/Add.2; A/66/462/Add.2); security and nuclear matters (A/67/406; A/67/409) thus in line with the analysis conducted on the other two group of sources. A thorough analysis of the precise issues on which there is unanimity, however, has yet to be done.

²⁷⁸ For example, on issues concerning recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, all five Central Asian states voted exactly the opposite of Russia.

6.7 Findings and Conclusions

In this short chapter, I have tried to set out four hypotheses. Here, I discuss their validity. An accurate, scrutinised analysis of speeches, documents and voting convergence in the UNGA has revealed that, consistently with what has been shown in the rest of the thesis, also at the international level the five Central Asian republics endorse the same norms and agree on a number of them.

Referring often to environmental problems, security-related issues, possible ethnic clashes and fearing domination from the Great Powers, they support strong pluralist norms and values of international relations: territorial integrity, Westphalian conceptions of sovereignty (that is, emphasis on non-interference and constitutional insularity), reliance on international law and diplomacy as the sole modes of conflict resolution, an equitable global economic order, plus a common solidarist concern on the environment.

The very interesting, preliminary finding of this chapter is that while at the regional level the five republics may struggle to find a meeting of minds, at the international level they speak the same language, and abide by the same institutions. With the appropriate caveats, and bearing in mind the weakness of the society present in the region noted in the previous chapters, this seems to be in line with what other senior scholars have said of the region, namely the presence of a Central Asian ‘club’ (Cummings 2002: 11) or of a ‘Central Asian standard’ (Cooley 2012: 151).

Thus, the first two hypotheses seem to be correct. A task for future research will be that of bringing to the surface the reasons for this regional-global divide of the Central Asian *Weltanschauung*, as well as possibly enhancing the arguments made in this chapter with additional fieldwork data and even more interviews with UN Central Asian bureaucrats.

In addition, as noted several times in the course of the thesis, the UN has been called upon by Central Asian countries several times to back and arrange regional cooperative arrangements, as was the case of the IFAS and the CANWFZ. The common appeal to the UN has been made possible by a normative convergence on the realist values of security, stability and survival, and their common interest in preserving their sovereignty, statehood and territorial integrity has stimulated cooperation at the international level. Also the third hypothesis is, therefore, defensible.

However, the findings do not suggest in any way that there is something specific to the way that Central Asian states conduct their international relations *at the international level*. Thus, the fourth hypothesis seems to be the weakest one. Given the analysis presented above, at the international level there is hardly something that can lead us to think that there is a distinct, identifiable Central Asian identity, meant as a set of political, normative and cultural features that distinguish this region from others. Rather, the chapter has shown how Central Asian states have adopted and endorsed the most common pluralist norms of international society, thus favouring a world order based on the values on peaceful coexistence and limited co-operation.

It should be noted that the emphasis of the chapter was on cooperation among Central Asian states at the international level, and therefore on their normative convergence, not on their normative *distinctiveness* as a group. This has been already done in the previous chapters, where the peculiar understandings and adoptions of global norms and institutions in relations with each other has been discussed and brought to the surface.

Analytically speaking, the importance of this chapter is exactly that of showing that we may have different understanding of global norms depending on the level of analysis. The very same norms, rules and institutions that inform the global texture of international politics may well be reconsidered and re-interpreted in a given regional environment without necessarily being disputed when states from that given regional environment have to act on the global scene. And here we go back to what was stated in the introduction, that is, that the ES has yet to fully engage with norm localisation(s) and *diatopical* (literally ‘across places’) interpretation of institutions: what is valid *here* may not be valid *there*.

In the end, it may well be that while at the international level we have idealtypical normative constructs (‘sovereignty’, ‘international law’, ‘market economy’ and so forth) in regional spaces we have the factual, concrete transposition of such idealtypes in particular practices. It is a matter of polysemy of institutions, that is to say, the different meaning/practice that they assume in different contexts.²⁷⁹ Chapter 5, for instance, has discussed how sovereignty, GPM and international law are used and understood in the Central Asian context, but in this chapter very general references to them have been made, thus suggesting that there is an interpretative

²⁷⁹ On the polysemy of institutions and the ES, see Costa Buranelli (2014b).

discrepancy between regional and global contexts.

In Chapter 3, it was noted that one of the purposes of this thesis was exactly that of investigating the binomial relationship between the global and the regional, that is, how norms and institutions are played out within a regional context in comparison with a global one.



While Chapters 4 and 5 have addressed the two rounded arrows around ‘regional international society’, providing an idiographic account of the regional context, this chapter has addressed the linkage(s) between the rounded arrows and the straight, vertical one. That is, the relation between the institutional regional context and the global one. And the findings have suggested that Central Asian states, while adopting specific interpretations of global norms and rules regionally, do not replicate them at the global level.

In sum, if any, the differences from the global level are in how institutions are reframed and localised *internally*, in the region, as noted in the previous chapters, but not in how the rules of the game are played internationally. It may have been the case during the 1990s, when environmental problems inherited from the USSR, the ethnic split among the republics, their new entry in the market economy and their ‘autocratic solidarity’ to counter instability and regional conflagration were voiced at every international occasion as special features of the region. Common references to ‘Central Asia’ in the UN documents discussed above prove this.

After 2001, however, the trend is that of a region which is still perhaps existent in terms of a weak RSC (Buzan and Waever 2003), but not as a coherent group of states that are linked, internationally, by strong normative or political peculiarities, and certainly not by a common identity. As we noted, there is still a great deal of

convergence on numerous issues, but this convergence is no longer framed in a 'regional narrative'. This finding is quite an important one, since it departs from the conclusions drawn by Ferdinand on the ASEAN case, claiming that '[vote similarity in the UNGA] suggest[s] a coherent regional identity on the global stage' (2014: 14).

Disproving the hypothesis made in the introduction, the analysis above has shown how among Central Asian states there is strong convergence on several pluralist norms of international society, but this convergence is no longer imbued with 'regionness'. Notably, this finding comes from the multi-method adopted: having looked not only at the *quantity* of the normative convergence, but also at its *quality*, I was able to describe how the normative convergence was played out by the actors, whether alone or in group. And, once again, it is worth stressing that the analysis here confirms what has been discussed in the previous chapters, that is, a socio-structural re-configuration of the regional space from a dead-letter solidarism to a strong pluralism based on coexistence.

Where from here? Once again, this chapter did not intend to describe Central Asian states as highly cooperative. This, in fact, has not been the purpose of the thesis either. Converging voting patterns 'do not necessarily mean comprehensively close foreign relations, still less coordinated political action' (Ferdinand 2014: 16; see also Russett 1967: 60, Bailey et al. 2013: 30-31).

Rather, this chapter has made a case for considering voting behaviour and behaviour in general in the UNGA as an indicator of the pluralist, defensive normative position of the Central Asian states, thus shedding light on their sociability as actors in global international society and value-laden position in it. An ES reading of their position in the UNGA has revealed that these states agree on common norms and rules typical of a pluralist international society, and that despite their disagreement and competition in the region they endorse similar positions at the international level. Even if in relative conflict with each other, Central Asian states have managed to live together for the last twenty-two years advocating, adopting and implementing those international norms and rules that guarantee survival, peaceful coexistence and common life. It is not by chance that several diplomats and analysts I met during my fieldwork referred, among other factors, to 'informal mechanisms to prevent major conflicts', '*bona fide* rules' and 'normative thresholds' to explain why in Central Asia 'peaceful coexistence' and 'stable neighbourhood' have been possible in the last two decades.

The main aim of this chapter was indeed to focus on the international cooperation, or rather, dialogue, between Central Asian states, for convergence in international organisations

is a reality and it is a constant and under-considered element in foreign policy-making. It establishes parameters for cooperation inside as well as outside the region. It can counterbalance nationalist excesses. It shows that there is more common ground on broad foreign policy between the states in [Central Asia], and therefore the basis for closer potential cooperation, than accounts of the territorial disputes usually allow (Ferdinand 2014: 16).

Central Asian states' pluralist normative stance, as explained and illustrated by the findings, is the product of the recent birth of these states, of their precarious position in a challenging regional environment and of their historical, economic and political legacies. Confirming the findings of Chapter 5, if cooperation among Central Asian states is achievable, then it is likely to be effective only if based on the pluralist norms and institutions discussed in this chapter, and it will be, at least in its initial manifestations, short-termed, pragmatic and on specific issues. The value of the ES approach has been exactly that of shedding light on this *via media* between pure competition and pure cooperation, which have been the most common lenses of analysis to study international relations in Central Asia.

In a world that is speaking in increasingly different languages, especially when it comes to principles, norms and rules, to map and understand what states think is appropriate in international relations may be a useful point of departure to preserve order and predictability in an increasingly fragmented international society. And even if they are not as fashionable as Great Powers, Central Asian states are no exception. And having now addressed both the *regional* and the *global* aspects of the Central Asian international society, as well as their interaction, we may proceed to the conclusions of this thesis.

Chapter 7

Theoretical implications of the study and conclusions

A piece of research should be assessed on the basis of its contribution to the wider literature, its theoretical premises and of its stated aims, and not on the basis of the readers' hopes. Therefore, before discussing the merits of this research, one must keep in mind what this research was *not* about.

First of all, it was not a study based on cause-effect relationships. It has not sought to discover causal patterns for events in Central Asia, nor has it been interested in foresight and positivism-nuanced prediction. It has not been a normative study either: moral judgments, contestations of the state of affairs in Central Asia and suggestions for change have not been offered. It has been, consistently, with the premises, an interpretive, thick description of the *social mechanisms* that have kept relations between Central Asian states at a manageable level. In this respect, in a full ES spirit, this thesis has provided more of a *theory of norms* than a normative theory.

Furthermore, its aim was not to discover patterns of regionalism, of economic, legal and value-based convergence, nor to claim for a regional solidarity that, as it has been stressed several times, is not clearly visible after more than twenty years of independence. As it has been said, an international society is something different both ontologically and normatively. Rather, the aim was to shed light, to bring to the surface and to discuss the rule-based and institutional practices that have managed to channel, order and sustain relations between Central Asian states from independence until now, as well as their evolution, their utility and their perception by statesmen and experts in the region.

We started this journey through the socio-structural characteristics of the Central Asian region willing to discover whether an international society is present among the Central Asian republics. We reviewed the literature to build a springboard from which the analysis could start. The springboard was mainly a negative one: not only is competition the main driver in the region, but an absence of dialogue is indeed the main marker of the social structure of the region (in IR terms). Dis-integration is the leading trend, disagreement and realist logics are in play and there is no space for rules, norms and institutions. The analysis conducted above, that spanned three chapters, has sought to verify whether these statements represent the 'last word', the

truth on Central Asian intra-regional politics.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 have shown, to the extent that the sources allowed and the research material displayed, that since the demise of the Soviet Union and their birth as sovereign states in the international system, the Central Asian states have always adopted rules and norms of coexistence and co-operation to address regional crises and events.

It has been also stressed many times that, despite their increasing individuality and autonomy in terms of economic development and foreign policy action, standards of conduct and norms-guided actions have always been present in the management of relations between each other. Perhaps these norms and institutions that have been identified are not fully developed, fully entrenched and not inherently linked to a developmental, regional political construct, but they have so far worked successfully in preserving inter-state peace and communication among the actors.

In addition, Chapter 6 has also shown how the endorsement of norms, rules and institutions is not just to be found at the regional level but also on the international scene.

Perhaps more importantly, the thesis has not analysed the socio-structural conformation of the region in a temporal vacuum, but has taken into consideration the temporal dimension, not just to consider the presence of an international society in the region, but also its development. Through the analysis of primary sources, interviews, and governmental documents, and by constantly keeping an eye on the evolution of the international context, the thesis has shown how in Central Asia there has been a shift from a dead-letter solidarism to a far more marked pluralism: minimal, basic but nonetheless existent and effective.

In these conclusions, I will address the following three and last research questions: what is the core of the Central Asian order, if any? How can this research help understand the region better? What is the place of Russia in the region? After answering these questions, I illustrate how the dialogue between the ES and Central Asia has been fruitful, indicate some directions for further research and bring this thesis to an end.

7.1 Is there a core Central Asian order?

To discuss the core of the Central Asian order means to assume that there is a Central

Asian order. And that was one of the purposes of the thesis. That is, to verify whether international relations in the region are guided by some principles, procedures and minimal rules rather than by accident, mere power-politics and unpredictable actions *in a way distinguishable from adjacent international societies and that at the global level*.

Yet, we still need to make one step ahead. As a matter of fact, as it is nowadays, the Central Asian international society is a sub-element of two larger (and in part overlapping) regional international organisations (and therefore, it may be argued, societies): the CIS (and its military offshoot, the CSTO) and the SCO on the correspondence between regional international organisations and regional international societies, see Buzan 2004; on the CIS as a regional international society, see Pourchot and Stivachtis 2014; on the SCO as a regional international society, see (Aris 2010).

From an analytical perspective, therefore, this may pose two problems. The first problem is: if, following Buzan, a regional international society is manifest in regional international organisation, then how can we claim that there is a Central Asian international society if there are no purely Central Asian international organisations? The second problem is: if states forming a region are member of more than one regional organisation, with overlapping norms and rules, then what are we to make of regional international societies?²⁸⁰

As far as the first problem is concerned, it may be recalled that an answer was suggested in Chapter 2. That is, I do not believe that a regional international society must necessarily be reflected in the existence of a regional international organisation (adopting the ES jargon, we may say that there is no necessary correspondence between primary institutions and secondary institutions). I concurred with Diez and Whitman (2002) that a regional international society can indeed exist on its own without necessarily being represented by an international organisation.

Here, it is argued that what defines regional international societies is the presence of norms, rules and institutions that bind all members of the sub-systemic group and that differ from those at the global level in terms of interpretation, quantity or quality. Historical international societies prove this point. During the expansion of the European international society in the XIX century, several regional, localised

280 I am very much grateful to Dr Yannis Stivachtis for the scholarly discussions he has held with me on this point in the final stages of the research.

international orders came close to each other, and clashed. But these several arrangements were not mirrored by corresponding regimes. Should we then dismiss their existence only because of the absence of more formalised political supranational arrangements?

With respect to the second problem, things get analytically more difficult. The international society in Central Asia, the CIS and the SCO all have a strong pluralist architecture, emphasising sovereignty, international law, non-interference, territorial integrity and diplomatic resolution of controversies. In terms of membership, the Central Asian states are members of both of them. Turkmenistan, as usual, is the exception in both: associate member in the CIS, guest observer in the SCO. So, is there any meaningful indicator that the Central Asian order is something identifiable and autonomous with respect to the two aforementioned international organisations?

After the examination of the intra-regional international relations in Central Asia, and after discussing the norms, rules and institutions underpinning them, the verdict of this research is the following: there is an international society *in Central Asia*, but it is perhaps too early to claim for the existence of a *Central Asian* international society. The analysis of regional events, the historical narrative adopted, the interpretive examination used to understand the presence of normative structures in the region from the words of practitioners have revealed that yes, Central Asia is a social environment (in IR theory terms), where states manage and channel their intercourses in normatively imbued tracks, even if sometimes these tracks seem weak and feeble.

Even if national interest is still paramount, these institutions, these norms, according to the findings, do play a role in preventing escalations, relations from worsening and the so much feared (for years, but not borne out by events) ‘descent into chaos’ (Rashid 2008). More important, from a methodological and epistemological viewpoint, is that this research, by directly engaging foreign policy makers, diplomats, analysts, strategists, scholars and experts, shows that there is an *awareness* of the operation of these norms and institutions, which the literature has so far neglected.

Yet, institutional differentiation from the wider macro-regional level and, more importantly, from adjacent regions and from the global level is still too weak to claim for the existence of a strong, discernible and identifiable Central Asian order. Partly because of the open character of the region, comfortable with allowing the penetration

of great power politics, partly because of the states' need to escape their landlocked position for trade, and partly because of their recent birth, the international society there is still weak, in flux, in formation, as indeed argued by practitioners there.²⁸¹ This point was already made in Chapter 5 when speaking of the 'informality' of institutions in Central Asia.

While some institutional differentiation has been pointed out (strong Westphalian sovereignty, state-reinforcing nationalism, informal understanding of most of international law, prevalence of personal diplomacy, omni-balancing, management of great powers instead of great power management), membership criteria, a clear inside/outside dynamic with respect to regional/non-regional states and a core institution that distinguishes the region from the wider environment are still lacking. This is exemplified, as noted, by the spaghetti-bowl regional institutionalisation in the region, with the CIS, the SCO, the CICA, the OIC, the OSCE, all institutions with different mandates and comprising most of the Central Asian states, overlapping.

However, this should not be a cause of despair, and for three reasons. First, there is still a clear sense of a 'Central Asia' among these states, despite rising competing discourses, and researchers both from area studies and IR theory should continue to make sense of these discourses and of how they structure and form regional spaces and regional interactions.

Second, another reason why this lack of differentiation should not be a source of despair is the fact that the comparative branch of the ES regional agenda is still in its infancy. We need to know much more about the CIS in general, South Asia, East Asia the Middle East and how Iran and Afghanistan fit into these structures to know with more certainty whether a Central Asian order can be distinguished from its neighbours or not. Clearly, this research is the first step in this direction, since works from an international society perspective on the region have been missing so far.

Nonetheless, a preliminary comparison with other regional contexts may seem appropriate to better specify the place of Central Asia in international society. Keeping in mind that this form of socio-institutional comparison in ES scholarship is still in its infancy, we may tentatively draw the following parallels:

²⁸¹ I included my interviewees' narratives on this point in Appendix 4.

- Middle East: despite having being described as an international society in its own respect (Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009, Gol 2015) scholars such as Katarina Dalacoura (2010) and Hoffmann (2015) have pointed to the weaknesses of such a conceptualisation of the region, in particular pointing at how endemic war, penetration of great power, the porosity of borders and the big rift dividing Sunni and Shiia populations have in fact prevented the emergence of a regional international society. Therefore, in this region, the very existence of a regional international society is put into question despite the presence of several secondary institutions such as the League of Arab States (LAS) or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). More tellingly, some Central Asian interviewees made reference to the Middle East as an arena of conflict and struggles for power, something that they denied to exist in their region (Murden 2009).
- Central Africa: the Central Asian international society identified in this research, albeit as said being in flux and weak, is different from the social realm one may find in Central Africa. And, worth stressing again, this was recognised in the course of some interviews. In terms of borders, state capacity, respect of minimal rules of international law and respect for the authority/authoritarianism, the two regional contexts can be differentiated quite markedly, also thanks to the Soviet experience when it comes to state apparatuses. In the interviews, these differences were interestingly framed in a very much premodern reading of international society.
- South Asia: here, differences between the two regional societies are both in terms of primary institutions and secondary ones. With respect to primary institutions, one may say that management of nuclear weapons features very prominently in South Asia (hosting two nuclear nations such as India and Pakistan), while Chapter 4 of this dissertation has traced the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. The presence of nuclear weapons in the hands of the two hegemonies of the regions has of course repercussions on how relations are managed in South Asia: mainly distrust, enmity and hostility. In addition, long-lasting territorial disputes, which in Central Asia have been successfully silenced at least at the inter-presidential level, have sometimes brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war and mutual denial. Having

reviewed international relations in Central Asia, one may conclude that despite the predominantly un-cooperative relations between states in the region, rules of coexistence and short-term cooperation are indeed more stable and interiorised than in this context. In terms of secondary institution, one may note that South Asian states are grouped in a specifically regional international organisation, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which is something not to be seen in the Central Asian context. Yet, again, this organisation has not been able to contain rivalry between the two powers, thus resulting in a dead-letter international society (akin to the CACO in the early 2000s).

- North East Asia: with respect to Central Asia, North East Asia appears to be a more developed international society, especially thanks to stronger and more enhanced economic ties and market integration (Buzan and Zhang 2015). Yet, a disputed balance of power between the two poles of the region (China and Japan), the still unmanaged framework for the development of nuclear technologies in North Korea, the persistence of aggressive nationalism and hostile readings of history of the region adopted by the leaders themselves plus the weak role of international law when it comes, for example, to territorial and maritime disputes make us think of a more competitive environment than Central Asia, or certainly one where competition is more visible and overt when it comes to serious political issues. However, when it comes to business, North East Asia is capable of fostering economic cooperation and integration in a way still unknown to Central Asia.
- The (South) Caucasus: here, perhaps, is where differences are starkest. The Caucasus featured prominently in several interviews as ‘the other’, as something *not* to become similar to. Here, the over-institutionalisation of sovereignty, territoriality, borders, and nationalism, paired with the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh have led to a situation in which the society of states resembles most visibly a Hobbesian scenario, where total enmity, mutual denial and absence of diplomatic channels are the norm. ‘Yes, we are competitive, but we respect each other, look at the Caucasus’ was a very widespread narrative in my interviews with Central Asians. The Caucasus has in fact been quoted in several interviews as ‘what Central Asia is not’, i.e. as a

place where diplomacy, informal cooperation and minimal coordinative understandings are simply, for now, not possible.

In sum, in Central Asia there is a *raison de systeme* that in other contexts seems to be weaker, or framed differently. It is true that cooperation in Central Asia, as in fact has been reiterated several times in the course of the thesis, should not be overemphasised. Yet, when it comes to interstate relations and high politics, leaders in Central Asia seem to have been playing according to the rules of the game, if with difficulties and complications. There is a conscious, shared understanding that some thresholds and norms have to be followed and respected if the system is to be maintained.

It is worth stressing once more that it is clear that cooperation and convergence should not be overstated. This thesis wants to assert the degree of socialisation between Central Asian states by starting from facts on the ground, not by imposing a framework to see desired results. What has been found in the course of the research is that despite the markedly realist character of the region, minimal cooperation, agreements, compromises and common understandings can be reached. Also, it is important to stress the fact that, *contra* most structural readings, actors' words matter. An in the Central Asian context, as we have seen (see also Appendixes), the interviewees and the sources employed do make reference to socialisation of states.

Another aspect to consider, already reiterated, is that this work will add to a literature which is only in its infancy. The comparative exercise which is being made here is, and can be, only superficial, due to the already noted infancy of the comparative dimension in the ES. Nonetheless, the short comparison presented above should serve to 'relativise' the Central Asian context, and to carve out a niche in which politics in this region can be analysed in its own merit.

In addition, one should remember that, following the main theorisation of international societies (Buzan and Gonzalez Pelaez 2009) a regional international society is deemed to exist not just when shared norms and institutions are found between states (otherwise that would amount to characteristics of interstate relations in general), but when these norms and institutions are *recognised* by the actors, are deemed to be legitimate and are filled with a specific (regional) meaning. This is why, from a linguistic perspective, I found extremely interesting and relevant how several

of my interviewees, without even being acquainted with the ES and its terminology, used words and concepts mostly associated to it. In this respect, I invite the reader to consult Appendixes 3 and 4 at the end of the thesis.

As the research has demonstrated, I believe it is not appropriate to characterise Central Asia as a full Hobbesian scenario, as rules of coexistence are not only recognised and considered legitimate, but may also have a different content or interpretation. There must be also the sense of ‘regional understanding’, of ‘regional awareness’, which of course may be more or less perceived by the actors involved. Certainly the society present in Central Asia is a coexistence-based one with traces of power political elements, but their presence should not obscure the fact that not only rules are in play, but are also recognised by the actors.

Moreover and lastly, we should also keep in mind that a regional international society, to exist, must not necessarily be much different from other regional contexts in terms of competition and/or cooperation, but may be legitimately differ in its interpretation and practice of certain primary institutions. While this is not the place to reiterate such different interpretations, as they have constituted the bulk of significant parts of the whole research, I nonetheless once more argue that how international law, great power management and neo-sovietism affect and regulate social relations between Central Asian states is an indication that specific institutional facts mark off Central Asia from other regional groupings of states.

Finally, the weak differentiation from the global level compels ES theorists to clearly define what the global level is. Is it the post-colonial order? Is it the post-WWII order? Is it the post-Cold War order? What institutions can be said to be truly ‘global’, given that even sovereignty is undergoing profound changes in its practice (Costa-Buranelli 2014b)? Competing cosmological and taxonomical views do not make the analytical distinction from global and sub-global international societies easy. Therefore, while the regional agenda of the ES should not lose its momentum, an eye should be kept on the terminological and conceptual opaqueness of the starting point of such agenda, i.e. the global level.

One can even tentatively argue that paradoxically, multi-membership in international organisations, in particular in the SCO, the CSTO and the CIS, can be seen as a *derivative* of the Central Asian primary institution of *omnibalancing*, that is, the mandate to prevent a single and only great power to penetrate the regional space. But this is a theoretical intuition that will require further research within the ES

community.

7.2 The utility of the enterprise

Having reached the final stage of the research, we should also ask whether the enterprise just carried out has an inherent utility. In the introduction we explained why this research was deemed to be necessary. But do the results obtained enhance our understanding of the region? In the light of the findings, I deem that it is fair to conclude that this research entrenches and ameliorate our understanding of the region in four main respects.

First, it has shown that between Central Asian states there are thresholds, limits and directions of behaviour that, even if weakly established, provide guidance and order to their intercourse. Even if these norms of conduct are violated from time to time, this does not infringe their value, their existence and their presence. Therefore, the first merit of this study has been to make the existence of these discursive and normative structures visible and evident.

Second, it has added to two bodies of literature at the same time: it has enriched the literature of area studies by providing a socio-normative reading of the region, the first work of its kind, and it has added to the literature of regional international societies by focusing on quite a neglected domain in the ES, that of the post-Soviet space (here, part of it).

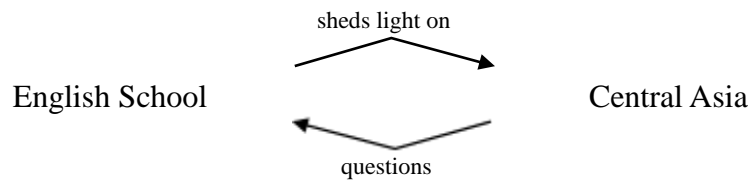
Third, by focusing on norms and institutions, this research provides a template for Western states and analysts to understand how relations between Central Asian states are likely to be in the near future, and to understand how to successfully engage them and on what bases.

Fourth and lastly, the value of this research is in that it shows how international relations and the concepts informing them, such as sovereignty, international law and diplomacy, are not a monopoly of the West, but are indeed subject to interpretation, redefinition and re-contextualisation in different parts of the world (here, Central Asia).

7.3 Mutual nourishment

At the beginning of the thesis, it was said that one of the purposes of the research was

to establish a dialogue between the theory used and the geographical area investigated, between the ES and Central Asia. It was also hypothesised that the relation between the theory and the region was not univocal, but in fact biunivocal, in the following way:



It was exactly one of the aims of this thesis to avoid an uncritical application of a theoretical lens to discover new facts. In fact, in the previous chapters, it has been shown how several peculiarities of Central Asian international politics act as a ‘stress-test’ for some of the main tenets of the ES, and indeed from a variety of viewpoints: methodologically (how ‘society’ has to be discerned), analytically (what elements should we look at to infer the existence of a ‘society’) and ontologically (what a ‘society’ actually is).

I believe that the ES can contribute to our understanding of Central Asia in at least six ways that other theories may have difficulty in offering. At the same time, I also believe that Central Asia has six ways to enrich the intellectual and theoretical baggage of the ES. The dialogue between the two is therefore based on an even set of propositions.

7.3.1 *What does the ES tell about Central Asia?*

1. Intra-regional relations are more dense than expected

Often considered as a non-existent region where dialogue between states is almost absent and where states look always outside for their relations (Gleason 2001; Libman and Vinokurov 2011; Olcott 2011; Cooley 2012; Cummings 2012; Zakhirova 2012), this thesis has revealed that in reality there is much more dialogue going on in Central Asia than is usually believed: witness the present author’s conversations and interviews with practitioners and diplomats. The fact that this dialogue is often about sensitive issues, and therefore takes place behind closed doors, does not make it

visible, and therefore the cognitive shortcut adopted in the majority of Central Asian studies is that of certifying the absence of it.

Yet, it has been shown how bilateral visits, phone-calls, meetings, diplomatic notes, allusions in public speeches and indirect references are very often in play. As was explained in the previous chapters, especially in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5, these narratives have been provided not only by people *making* foreign policy and international relations in the region (often under conditions of anonymity), but also by people *studying* foreign policy and international relations in the region. In particular, the latter have been very helpful in pointing at growing connections between scholars and analysts in the region, as well as think-tank and institutional activities aimed at fostering dialogue on regional issues.

In addition, contrary to one of my interviewees who stated that ‘we [Central Asians] do not have a common information space’²⁸² necessary to enhance, if not regional *identity*, at least regional *awareness*, it may be said that platforms for regional news and for knowledge of regional issues are indeed being born. Virtual information spaces such as CA-News, Akipress, UZMetronom, Asia Plus and Avesta, to name a few, all have tabs called ‘Central Asia’ where news from all the five regional states are presented and discussed (in UZMetronom the specific regional section is tellingly called ‘brat ‘a’, Russian for ‘brothers’).

Again, the important factor to consider is that these information platforms are endogenous to the region and not Western- or even Russian-funded/directed. While this was not a direct concern of this thesis, the existence of these ties at the academic and professional level, as well as these shared information spaces, may reinforce the notion of an ES Central Asian ‘world society’ (Bull 1977; Buzan 2004; Navari 2013; Kang 2014) in the region, but more on this will be said below.

2. *Cooperation and conflict are always present*

This has been perhaps the main finding of the thesis. While realist depictions of intra-regional relations have focused only on their competitive character, the ES approach adopted in this research has brought to the surface several examples of restraint, common understandings, meetings of minds and compromises in the region.

282 Interview with Kazakh Professor 1 at KIMEP.

The two case-studies analysed in Chapter 5 (the Osh events and the Rogun issue), the behaviour in the UNGA as analysed in Chapter 6 plus the whole Chapter 4 have all shown that, even if conflict is a structural, underlying feature of the region, successful mechanisms for preventing major disruptions and the collapse of the whole regional system have been always present and supported by the continuous use of the three main institutions operating in the region: sovereignty, international law and diplomacy.

3. *Disintegration does not mean absence of dialogue, but rather dialogue is even more important*

And here is the second major finding of the thesis. Far from being a fragmented region, there is much more social interaction between states in Central Asia than one may think. Chapter 4 has shown how during the 1990s the ‘dead-letter solidarism’ favoured calls for summits, meetings, conferences, common projects that even if mainly ceremonial in character (Olcott 1994a) had the merit of taming the negative effects abrupt independence acquired in 1991. The definition of different national interests and the hyper-institutionalisation of sovereignty, which nonetheless was progressive and not immediate after 1991, functioned as stumbling blocks for deeper cooperation.

But to state that these stumbling blocks have silenced dialogue in the region is, in the light of the findings, a simplistic overstatement. ‘Dis-integration’ must be contextualised and defined. If we are speaking of economic fluxes, bilateral and multilateral trade, foreign policy convergence (which is different from the normative convergence noted in Chapter 6), then the literature has already said a huge deal on this (Collins 2009; Pomfret 2009; Cummings 2012; Mogilevskii 2012; Laruelle and Peyrouse 2013).

Yet, if we speak of disintegration as absence of relations, then this is both *discursively* and *empirically* not true. Simply, relations are aimed at ensuring coexistence and limited, *ad hoc* cooperation on given matters (transit of goods, water-sharing, definition of borders, limited trade, diplomatic resolution of skirmishes, intercultural programs), and not at full-fledged integration. As one interviewee argued, ‘even if we are not a deeply integrated region, we are still close neighbours,

and we have to deal with each other'.²⁸³ Also, it is perhaps not by chance that in several inter-presidential meetings, as well as in the words of many of my interviewees, we can read the following expression: 'a good neighbour is better than a distant relative'.

One of the aims of the present thesis has been actually to show that the presence and the use of international (primary, in ES terms) institutions is what has made possible for these states to dialogue, coexist and live together. It is exactly what, aside from proximity and common historical ties and legacies, has made it possible for them 'to deal with each other'.

Also, as stated above, we cannot speak of absence of dialogue because of its very informal nature in the region.

As I have had the possibility to discover through interviewing senior diplomats, analysts and regional experts during my fieldwork, dialogue is indeed incessant and constant in the region - between governmental agencies, between experts, between think-tanks, between institutions. It is simply that, due to the sensitivity of the problems dealt with, the dialogue is often behind closed doors. And therefore, from a Western perspective, it may seem that these states prefer unilateralism in foreign policy.

Furthermore, a senior Uzbek diplomat has agreed on this view stating that it is exactly because there is dialogue, even if hidden, that the region can sustain itself. He has further added that bilateral meetings between the presidents, also those very informal or at the margins of wider CIS, OSCE, SCO meetings, are indeed crucial to discuss several issues of mutual importance.²⁸⁴

This statement runs against current work done on the region analysing the degree of 'regionness' by counting state visits over time (Zakhirova 2012). In an attempt to 'positivise' and make visible a 'Central Asia' which is presumably 'out there' and 'identifiable', she counts the number of high-level states visits between the Central Asian republics, but dismisses wider meetings (such as those mentioned above), as she bases her analysis on bilateral meetings only (2012: 31).

283 Interview with Kazakh Professor 1 at KIMEP; a narrative found also in an interview with an international lawyer in Kazakhstan; interview with Irina Chernykh; interviews with Uzbek sources 1 and 2.

284 Interview with official Uzbek source.

Zakhirova adds that '[v]isits solely for the purpose of attending a multilateral meeting are dropped from the dataset, unless there was a clear indication that bilateral relations took place on the sidelines' (2012: 31). Yet, she does not explain how this 'clear indication' is to be found, and neglects the role of informal, loose dialogue that occurs between Central Asian presidents/representatives even when meetings are not scheduled, as confirmed to me by several diplomats from the region. Zakhirova herself seems aware of the problem when shortly after presenting her methodology she states that '[u]sing dyads may potentially blur the distinction between local interactions and the more comprehensive interactions among the [Central Asian] states' (2012: 31).

Therefore, exactly *because*, and not *despite*, Central Asian states are taking different positions in world politics, dialogue, respect of certain norms of coexistence and adherence to some of the institutions of international society are of paramount importance in the region: to live close to each other, to preserve order and manageability of the regional system and to give predictability to their intercourses.

4. *Turkmenistan is part of the region*

An ES reading of the region, with its focus on norms and institutions, has shown that Turkmenistan has indeed followed the principles of its declared neutrality adopted in 1995 under Niyazov, but that this was slightly different from pure isolation. Turkmenistan has often literally 'embodied' the institution of diplomacy in Central Asia. Indeed, major talks to put an end to the Tajik civil war, several meetings on the status of the Aral Sea, multilateral meetings to face challenges and even resolutions of bitter disagreements among leaders took place in Ashgabat.²⁸⁵

In addition, we noted in Chapter 5 how regional states as well as the UN itself deemed appropriate to choose Ashgabat as the site of the UNRCCA. While Turkmenistan continues to be less active than its neighbours in terms of joining multilateral platforms, under the presidency of Berdymukhamedov Turkmenistan has adopted several institutions of international society more consistently. For example, diplomatic activity in the region is on the rise. Ashgabat has recently opened its

²⁸⁵ For example, on 8 April 1999, Ashgabat was chosen as site for a CAEC meeting also because of tensions between Rahmon and Karimov. Niyazov proposed himself as mediator, and the rather informal nature of the meeting helped diffuse tensions. Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 9 April, 1999, 'Ashgabat zhdet gostej', archival material from the Bayalina Library, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

embassy in Kyrgyzstan, and Berdymukhamedov has met Atambayev for the first time in November 2014. Several official meetings have taken place since then. Bishkek has also opened a new, bigger embassy in Ashgabat, thus signalling the will to enhance bilateral ties. There is now a concerted position with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on water-issues.

In addition, Ashgabat has been consistently calling its Central Asian neighbours ‘fraternal states’ and strategic partners, and considers them as the priority of Turkmenistan’s foreign policy.²⁸⁶ Other institutions adopted are international law (as illustrated in Chapter 6 with respect, again, to water-issues), environmentalism, slow and cautious adoption of market economy principles.

Turkmenistan has also intensified political consultations with Kyrgyzstan (Turkmen MFA 2014), Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In particular, with respect to the latter, the meetings have acquired the character of a ‘regular summit’ in Central Asia, in the words of the Press Service of the Uzbek Presidency (UZA 2014).

5. A region does (still) exist

This is another major finding of the thesis, and it goes to the core of the thorny question, present both in Area Studies and in International Relations more widely, presented in Chapter 3: does a Central Asia exist? As discussed, a realist framework of analysis, focusing mainly on rivalry and competition, has consistently argued that Central Asia is not a region. In the same way, due to the lack of integrated markets, international organizations and sustained, thick movements of people and capitals, Central Asia is not a region in a liberal sense either.

Yet, this thesis goes beyond these ‘bumper-stickers’ applied from outside, and has tried to see how ‘Central Asia’ is seen from within the region, inductively. The findings (to be observed in the narratives of the interviewees, as well as in official documents) show that Central Asia still exists as a powerful explanatory geographical, cultural and political shortcut held by Central Asians themselves to identify the five states forming the region (see Appendix 2).

Several elements can substantiate this argument. To begin with, all regional states, in their official doctrines and documents, identify ‘Central Asia’ as a matter of

²⁸⁶ This happened on 12 December 2012, when Berdymukhamedov approved the concept of Turkmenistan’s foreign policy for 2013 – 2017 (RIA Novosti 2012).

priority, if not *the priority*, of their foreign policy.²⁸⁷ This, arguably, would not occur if a 'regional sphere of action' did not exist. Secondly, diplomats, analysts, strategists, academics I interviewed affirmed that while it is true that Central Asia refers to the early 1990s when a common identity and a common legacy were more marked and prominent, and while it is true that the relational norm seems to be bilateralism rather than multilateralism, the term has still a clear validity in the political discourse of the five states.

In particular, this has implication for the recent Eurasian discourse sweeping the post-Soviet space and, most notably, for Kazakhstan. One of the questions of my interview questionnaire was exactly 'do you consider Kazakhstan as a Central Asian country?', thus, in fact, asking two hidden question: 'where does Kazakhstan belong?' and 'is there a Central Asia which it can belong to?' Answers can be studied from two different perspectives: from the non-Kazakh side and from the Kazakh side. All the non-Kazakh interviewees agreed on the fact that Kazakhstan is a Central Asian country. Culture, norms, linkages, common problems and mentality were cited as major ties (see Appendix 2).

Even more interestingly, Kazakhstan was considered Central Asian by most of the Kazakh interviewees. Again, they stressed common heritages, common mentality, common habits and solidarity ties among the leaders. With reference to the Central Asia/Eurasia divide, two answers, in particular, are worth stressing. The first one, given by Bulat Auelbaev, maintains that Eurasia and Central Asia are not mutually exclusive for Kazakhstan. In fact, Central Asia becomes necessary exactly in the light of the existence of Eurasia.²⁸⁸ According to him, 'since we [Kazakhs] are not the leader in the Eurasian Union, we need Central Asia to be leaders!'

The second answer was given to me by a diplomat who preferred to remain anonymous. He mentioned that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kazakhstan, until last year, used to have a 'Central Asian' administrative division, which was subsequently closed due to the more rapid pace of the Eurasian integration project.

287 We have discussed Turkmenistan above. For Kazakhstan, see 'Kazakhstan Foreign Policy Concept 2014-2020' <http://www.slideshare.net/kzembassyusa/kazakhstan-foreign-policy-concept-for-2014-2020>, accessed on 4 December 2014; for Kyrgyzstan, see 'Foundations of foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan', http://www.kyrgyzembarabia.kg/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=20&Itemid=36, accessed on 10 July 2013; for Tajikistan, see Tajik MFA (2014); for Uzbekistan, see Oliy Majlis (2012).

288 Interview with Bulat Auelbaev.

Yet, according to him, there are thoughts to reopen it, exactly because of the enduring and growing ties with the southern neighbours²⁸⁹. He also stressed that

Central Asia is one of our priority vector, if not the priority vector...our government considers relations with Central Asian states at the highest level, our Foreign Minister constantly refers to this. They are all of the utmost importance, it is important to have a solid regional environment...take into consideration also that one of our biggest embassies is in Tashkent, we have now a consulate in Osh, a big embassy in Ashgabat...these are all signs that we are indeed active part in and of the region.

Whenever Central Asian high ranking officials meet, when dealing with foreign issues, they often if not always stress the importance of ‘regional problems’ and ‘regional matters’. Border problems, transit routes, water-management, enclaves, as well as problems related to terrorism and security, even if dealt with at the bilateral level in the region, still tie the states in a dense relational framework.

6. Norms, rules and institutions are in play

This is the whole content of the thesis. Challenging a dominant (neo)realist framework of analysis of the region, the research has brought to the surface norms and institutions that confer a certain degree of order in Central Asia. Indeed, I can claim that this is the first work of its kind in the field of IR in Central Asia.

As noted in the introduction and in the literature review, not only analyses of intra-regional relations have been largely downplayed, but when they have been conducted they have dismissed any possible presence of normative dynamics. Referring to Zakhirova once again, one may indeed state that

the relationship among the five Central Asian states have not been fully or systematically studied. Thus, two decades after the Soviet Union’s collapse and despite the urgency of such international issues as regional security, border disputes, and conflict over natural resources, we know very little about *how* the CentralAsian states interact at the regional level to resolve various regional problems (2012: 26, emphasis added).

While Zakhirova’s work is perhaps the most recent in terms of intra-regional focus in IR, she fails exactly to answer the indirect question she is posing. Her analysis, as a matter of fact, does not show *how* Central Asian states interact, but only

²⁸⁹ Interview with diplomatic source in Kazakhstan.

whether they interact or not (with all the limits noted above).

My research, conversely, has aimed exactly at filling that gap, providing a thick description of how relations are managed in the region, and through what mechanisms. Constant references to sovereignty, diplomacy, non-intervention principles, international law, as well as to more informal practices such as president-to-president dialogues, problem-solving phone-calls and seniority-based relations among the elites are indicators that a template, a web of normative dynamics is in play, and helps the region sustain itself.

Indeed, it seems that this avenue of research fills some of the gaps of the realist literature: if in Central Asia there is so much competition and problems are so intractable, why is it the case that this is the only region in the world that has yet to experience an interstate conflict? Academics from the region knowledgeable about intra-regional relations have actually endorsed a move to the study of norms and institutions in Central Asia. According to Farkhod Tolipov, ‘realist and liberal readings of the region have not been very much productive. An approach similar to constructivism may be more valuable’.²⁹⁰ In addition, Azamat Temirkulov has, albeit indirectly, positively assessed an ES approach to the region:

Here international relations are more eclectically explained...countries sometimes violate international law, which is not binding, but also they don't always behave in power politics terms...there is also something else...and this something else can be found absolutely in Central Asia...This framework explains the exact relations that you see in Central Asia, not just at the level of cooperation, but explains also questions of peace and conflict, also, why there is no large conflict...it explains lots of things.²⁹¹

Once more, this research has shown, *contra* Cummings (2012), that the Central Asian states do form an international society, albeit perhaps a weak one, still in flux and formation. From a theoretical viewpoint, however, the important thing is that, in the light of the narratives above, Central Asia does not constitute a mere ‘system’. In the words of the protagonists, norms are always in play, they make foreign policy decisions more difficult and thornier, they prompt justifications when infringed and they help to avoid major interstate conflicts and the collapse of the entire region.

²⁹⁰ Interview with Farkhod Tolipov, Director, Bilim Karvoni Education Institution, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 6 February 2014, Skype interview from London, UK.

²⁹¹ Interview with Azamat Temirkulov.

If this is what an ES approach reveals about Central Asia, it is also true that Central Asia tells a lot to the ES.

7.3.2 What does Central Asia tell the ES?

1. Rediscovery of the fieldwork

As it was argued in the introduction, this thesis has departed from the strict analyticism inaugurated by the New ES (Buzan 2004), the attempt of which is to “soft-positivise” the ES, claiming that international society is something visible “out there”, in the implementations and sustainment of institutions and norms by the actors involved’ (Costa-Buranelli 2014a: 25).

The problem with this mind-world dualism (Jackson 2010) is that we, as analysts, run the risk of over-imposing our concepts from the outside without grasping the essence of social relations at play in a given region. Therefore, universals like ‘sovereignty’, ‘international law’, ‘diplomacy’ and the like lose their several facets, regional specificities and become one-size-fits-all concepts (Costa-Buranelli 2014b).

Thanks to the fieldwork carried out in the region, and thanks to the patience, the availability, the relative openness and the expertise of my interviewees, I have been able to understand *from within* how institutions play, and following what practices. From a mere analytical perspective, I would not have been able to grasp, for example, the very informal reading of international law in Central Asia, nor the Westphalian conceptualisation of sovereignty, not to mention how arbitration is (not) considered or that dialogue is held constantly among agencies behind closed doors. In relying on the witnesses of the *insiders*, I followed the inductive, qualitative strategy defended in Chapter 3.

Therefore, the case of a Central Asian international society tells the ES that, to grasp regional institutional specificities and how regional international societies are formed and played out, taking into account the words and the opinions of those forming the societies themselves is of utmost importance. As I argued elsewhere,

a researcher in the ES domain should adopt those methods that are most capable of revealing the perception, the acceptance and the “internalisation” of those institutions that are said to constitute the regional international society: interviews, fieldwork, exploration of archives and hermeneutical analyses are [...] the most relevant techniques to discover the *etic* aspect of the society under

investigation, thus having the possibility to account for the different understandings/interpretations of some globally established institutions and the presence of those rules and norms peculiarly regional that are adopted by states (Costa-Buranelli 2014a: 36).

In sum, especially in regions where institutions, norms and international political facts are new, the ES should abandon analytical arm-chair theorizing. If the aim is, following Jackson, to treat international relations as a form of international anthropology (Jackson 1995), studying the norms and the customs of different (regional) groups in the international system, then it is better to get one's hands dusty in the archives and feet muddy in the field.²⁹²

2. The state, as a unit, needs to be better conceptualised

If there is one thing that the ES shares with (neo)realism it is the assumption that the international system is anarchic and that the main unit of analysis in it are states. This is still the case despite recent attempts to move from the notion of interstate society to more comprehensive international society (Buzan 2004).

In an English School framework, states are the main actors engaging in socialisation, and the main enforcers and followers of norms and institutions. Yet, the Central Asian context poses problems to this apparently simplistic assumption. And in fact, this research is guilty of state-centrism. Due to parsimony and simplicity, in this research I have treated the state as a unitary, Westphalian actor, thus downplaying and silencing the complexities, the dynamics, the peculiarities and the idiosyncrasies of 'the state' in Central Asia.

Why is this important? Because, although hypothetically, a relationship can be established between the kind of state that populates a system and the norms and institutions professed by the aforementioned state. The weaker the states, the more pluralist, protective, minimal will be the society. This, again, hypothetical correlation was indirectly hinted at by some respondents, who linked the relative inter-state peaceful environment in the early 1990s exactly because leaders were too concerned in gaining domestic legitimacy and running newly acquired, but very shaky, state machineries.

This research has focused solely on the structural/systemic level, trying to

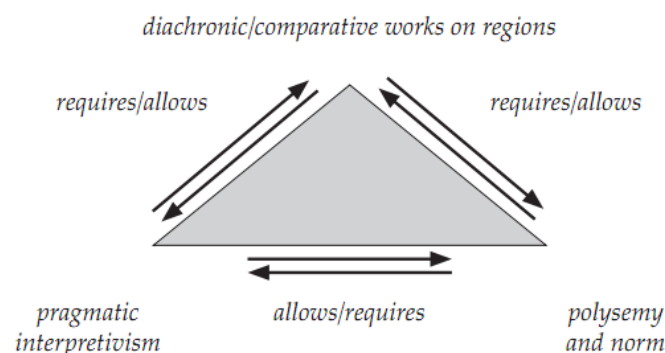
²⁹² As one of my interviewees put it, 'to understand these dynamics [international relations in Central Asia], you have to come here, to read here, to speak here, to study here. You see Filippo, the fact that you came here gives you already a different understanding'. Interview with Aidos Sarym.

identify what norms are in play in the region and what function they perform in it. Yet, how and if weak domestic institutions, social structures, checks and balances and formal political procedures play a role in how the state behaves at the normative level has been unexplored, and this is valid for the ES literature in general (Ba 2014). More on this, however, follows below in the ‘Directions for further research’ section.

3. *Institutions vary according to regional contexts*

Much has been said on this in Chapter 5 when speaking of the ‘polysemy’ of institutions, so there is no need to prolong the discussion here. Yet, it is worth stressing that this research has shown the ES that what it calls ‘institutions of global international societies’ are actually far less global than one may think. Sovereignty, diplomacy and international law, as we have seen, have quite a different meaning in Central Asia, and are adopted in quite a different way from the European international society.

As discussed in the ‘fieldwork’ section, once analyticism is dismissed in favour of interpretivism and more qualitative strategies, how institutions are conceptualised and practiced by statesmen and diplomats in the region becomes more accessible, and helps create the basis of a sociology of international relations based on socio-behavioural differentiation on a regional basis.



Source: Costa Buranelli 2014a: 38.

Once again, though, I refer to the ‘Directions for further research’ section to discuss how an institutional sociology of international relations may look like in future.

4. *Formality and informality can differentiate regions as well*

In the course of the research it has been noted several times how interviewees and practitioners from the region more in general tend to consider the Central Asian

region as a realm where things are done informally and following more personal relations. Diplomacy and international law, it has been noted, have very few formal characteristics in this region, and rely more on personal dispositions, informal contacts, pragmatic devices than abstraction, procedures, formality and principles.

As noted, proof of this in the region is the reference to treaties and conventions, not to better regulate affairs among states, but rather as leverage when things get worse. To my knowledge, this is something new to the ES regional theorising. It has been said that three ways of regional differentiation from the global level exist in the theory as it stands (see Chapter 3):

- institutional surplus;
- institutional deficit;
- different interpretation of a global institution.

Yet, I believe this research has laid the first stone to consider differentiating regions (both among themselves and from the global level) on the basis of the formality/informality of their practices and institutions. Clearly, this would require a definition of what is meant by ‘formality’, and more research in those regions which are supposedly formal to verify the presence of informal elements there as well.

Nonetheless, the Central Asian case can be a good starting point to start thinking of other analytical techniques and methodological routes to identify regional international societies, where the distinctive element(s) can be the shallow degree of interiorisation of global norms complemented or indeed even substituted by a resort to informal local habits and informal practices, something well researched domestically but still absent from the international realm (Acharya 2004; Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Razo 2008).

5. *Diachronic studies show how can we move from solidarism to pluralism and vice versa*

This thesis can be said to be the first ES work to treat a regional international society diachronically, and therefore moves beyond the present literature focused on regional international societies as they appear *now* (as opposed to as they *develop*). Indeed, this thesis is a ‘diachronically idiographic analysis’ (Costa-Buranelli 2014a: 27) of the social character of international relations in Central Asia.

Chapters 4 and 5 treated the region in an evolutionary way, showing how its structural conformation moved from a dead-letter solidarism to a strong pluralist environment and due to what factors (penetration of Great Powers, increasing rivalries over water, sharper definition of modes of development, harder conceptualisation of state-related institutions such as sovereignty and borders).

The ES literature, as it is, presents very detailed accounts of how different regional societies look like at the moment of writing or in the past, focusing on their pluralist *or* solidarist institutional character, but an analysis of how a regional international society evolves from a normative and structural perspective is still missing, as well as an analysis of a region that encompasses moves *along* the pluralist/solidarist spectrum.

The hope is, therefore, that this work, still imperfect in many respects, will nonetheless encourage more idiographic, intensive works on specific regional international societies, covering decades of evolving social relations sustained by different norms, rules and institutions.

6. There seems to be a correlation between regional international society, regional security complex and forms of regionalism

When writing in 2009, Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez argued that the analysis of the Middle Eastern regional international society provided ground for theorising a hypothetical relationship between regional international societies (RIS) and regional security complexes (RSC). Building on a set of conceptual dyads, they argued that a power-political RIS would constitute a dense RSC structured on enmity lines, a solidarist, convergent RIS would constitute a dense RSC structured on amity lines, and a co-existential RIS would constitute a weakly structured RSC, where uncertainty is the main socio-relational feature.

This thesis in its turn, complements an existing body of research, and puts forward the case for considering not just a correlation between the density of a RIS with the density of a RSC, but also considerations on regionalism (RGN). Put in relation with each other,

the regional international society pillar represents the social character of relations among states, from conflict to confederation, passing through co-existing pluralism to developmental solidarism [...]; the regional security complex pillar represents the strategic-

security character of the region, which can develop from conflict formation to security community where war is unthinkable among the regional members; the forms of regionalism represent the integrative character of the region, ranging from sporadic interactions through more coordinated and integrated action to a federation of states [...] (Costa-Buranelli 2014a: 29).

The Central Asian case presented in this research reinforces Buzan's and Gonzalez-Pelaez's hypothesis, having found that the weak, sub-RSC described in the literature (Allison and Jonson 2001; Buzan and Wæver 2003) is mirrored, or rather, sustained, by a co-existential, Westphalian RIS, where regional stability is achieved through the respect of few, minimal norms and, in particular, via the non-intervention principle.

This 'hyper-institutionalisation' of sovereignty in the Central Asian RIS has of course effects on the prospects of regionalism, as has been observed in this thesis and in the wider literature as well. Sovereign rights, diverging national interests, the Turkmen neutrality and the prevalence of bilateralism as the regional diplomatic norm have thwarted prospects for more inclusive, integrated regionalism. In particular, the low level of security interactions (and cooperation) among the Central Asian states have been described by regional analysts as 'uncertain',²⁹³ and this characterisation fits well with the proposed correlation between types of RIS, levels of RGN and types of RSC.

In sum, this research has shown that there is scope for more comparative research focussing on the relationship between RIS, RSC and RGN: East Asia, Latin America and West Africa are good candidates for this kind of analysis. While generalisation here is not appropriate, it should be noted that the Central Asian case presented here follows the theoretical premises advanced by Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez, and therefore suggests that more research in other regional domains may entrench this work's theoretical findings.

7.4 The Bear in the Room

Yes, usually we are uncomfortable with 'an elephant in the room', especially when we pretend that it does not exist. Yet, a bear may cause the same effect. And by reading this thesis, one may ask: where is Russia? Is Russia part of the international society

²⁹³ Interview with Rustam Burnashev; interview with Irina Chernykh.

found in Central Asia?²⁹⁴

This question seems extremely relevant for three factors. First, the historical and political legacies shared by Russia and the region at the time of the USSR. Second, the role that Russia plays as security-guarantor in the region.²⁹⁵ Third, the development of a new pole of integration led by Russia, namely the Eurasian Economic Union, soon to be Eurasian Union. At a more theoretical level, this question has relevance for general ES regional studies as well: to what extent are great powers members of the regional societies they border or are simply proximate to?²⁹⁶

An easy and elusive answer to this question would be: the focus of the thesis was on the Central Asian republics only, and therefore any presence of any external actor was not considered. Even if Central Asian intra-regional relations were indeed the focus of the thesis, to rely on this answer only would not actually answer the question of whether Russia is part of them or not. This would be analytically inaccurate and theoretically biased. Instead, a more comprehensive answer would be what follows. Using the theoretical framework of the ES, I have claimed that Russia certainly forms a system with Central Asia, but it is not strictly part of the society of states there. Russia has not been cut out of the picture altogether, but has been rather located in the GPM institution of international society.

In chapter 4 and 5 I have discussed how, for problems such as terrorism, fundamentalism, drug-trafficking, Central Asian states are willing to adopt the institution of GPM to shield them from such dangers and menaces. Even Karimov has recently argued that ‘Russia’s interests have always been present in Central Asia, and it always had a stabilizing character’ (Akipress 2014e). Yet, I have also explained how in bilateral spats, GPM is explicitly rejected in the region, for fear that more powerful

²⁹⁴ I am grateful to Dr Ruth Deyermond for having encouraged me to tackle this problematique over the course of my research.

²⁹⁵ Russia has been consistently the main security provider in the region since 1991. For a recent overview on military assistance, weapons sales and military cooperation, see Gorenburg (2014). From an economic viewpoint, Russia is the top exporter to Kazakhstan (36%) and Uzbekistan (22%), second top exporter to Kyrgyzstan (26%) and Tajikistan (18%) and third top exporter to Turkmenistan (17%; all data have been taken from <http://atlas.media.mit.edu>). In addition, Russia still constitutes a model of governance with respect to the adoption of domestic laws to thwart civil society (Michel 2014). Yet, for a recent contribution on Russia’s declined presence in the region, see Meshcheryakov (2014a,b).

²⁹⁶ This question, for example, is dealt with by Merke with respect to the relationship between the US and Latin America (2011: 16-21); by Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez with respect to the US and the Middle East (2009); by Buzan and Zhang with respect to the US in East Asia (2014a); and by Aalto with respect to Russia and the European international society (2007).

actors would take advantage of the situation.

Furthermore, there are two additional reasons why, in my opinion (an opinion supported by findings and narratives of international society actors in Central Asia), Russia *cannot* be considered a fully-fledged member of the Central Asian international society and, moreover, these reasons are strongly dependent on one another.

The first one is a crucially different understanding of the bedrock of international society, which is *sovereignty*. The second one, related to the former, is the different *structure* of international society that Russia seems to have in mind, clashing with the Central Asian one.

The CIS has been recently described as an international society on its own (Hansen 2014; Pourchot and Stivachtis 2014) on the premise that Westphalian sovereignty and non-interference are the foundational, constitutional norms of the region. Yet, recent events in Georgia (2009), Transnistria (2004-2010) and Ukraine (2014) seem to indicate that Russia has shifted to a weaker conceptualisation of sovereignty that allows for intervention and interference in its neighbourhood (Allison 2013: 146-147; Allison 2014; Kaczmarek 2014: 10-11; Navari 2014).²⁹⁷

Indeed, as Roy Allison has aptly put it, ‘Russia has traditionally regarded sovereignty *as a capacity, not a right*’ (2013: 214, emphasis added), which is a diametrically different view from that of the Central Asian states, as noted also in Chapter 6. This reading of sovereignty is paired with, I argue, a reading of the structure of regional international society, which is fundamentally different from the Central Asian understanding. Keeping in mind Watson’s pendulum (1992), Russia seems to favour a ‘hegemonic’ international society, by proposing a new order based on the legitimacy of its power and its role in maintaining the Eurasian continent cohesive, in particular via the CSTO.²⁹⁸ During the years of the ‘coloured revolution’, Central Asian states were indeed in favour of such ‘protective integration’. As it has

297 Quite tellingly, a recent poll published by the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre at www.wciom.com showed that 56% of respondents saw ‘Northern Kazakhstan’ as part of the ‘Russian world’. Yet, I was not able to find the actual size of the sample.

298 Roy Allison, although implicitly, frames this structural mismatch in the CIS in the following passage: ‘Russia, as a would-be regional hegemon, has a particular conception of norms which it enforces, and seeks to socialise others into viewing as legitimate, within its sphere of influence. ... The consolidation of this kind of normative regionalism, its evolution into some kind of regional international society, depends, however, on the internationalisation of its constituent norms by states other than Russia’ (Allison 2013: 214, emphasis added).

been argued,

[Central Asian states] viewed [CSTO] increasingly as an instrument to enlist Russian support for regime security, as a vehicle to bandwagon with Russia in forging a kind of Eurasian political club that only selectively promotes and applies Euro-Atlantic political principles and values (or openly resists them). The CSTO offered a form of normative bandwagoning, or “protective integration”, to bolster the political legitimacy of CSTO presidents on the international stage (Allison 2013: 140).

Yet, as noticed, recent events show how this now contrasts with the strong, sovereignty-as-equality-based system in Central Asia, where a firm balance of power and a strong notion of sovereign parity exist among members.

Already in 2011, for example, Nazarbayev proposed at the Astana SCO summit in June 2011 a council for resolving territorial and regional conflicts in the ‘SCO’s area of responsibility’ (Allison 2013: 142). Even if there was no follow-up, this can be read as a sign of balancing competing readings of order within the CIS by adopting a peculiar practice of the institution of great power management, that of the management of great powers (Goh 2014).

In addition, recent difficulties in establishing supranational bodies of political character within the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), for example, show how even for Kazakhstan, the Central Asian state which is most in favour of cooperating with Moscow in multilateral bodies, the issue of sovereignty is crucial (24 News Agency 2014).²⁹⁹ The following words, again by Allison, on how Central Asia wants to be somehow ‘detached’ from a more hierarchical CIS support the points made above:

[The failure of making the CSTO more interventionist] has left the CIS regional order, *especially its Central Asian flank*, fractured and tense. The Arab Spring has made regional leaders more defensive about their domestic political legitimacy and cohesion as well as their standing in the wider international community. At the same time, insecure CIS states remain sensitive to possible regional encroachments on their sovereignty if their grip on power weakens, whether that might be undertaken by their immediate neighbours, by Moscow or (especially for Uzbekistan) by a Russian-led structure like the CSTO (2013: 146, emphasis added).

299 See, e.g. for Kazakhstan Akipress, 25 August 2014; for Kyrgyzstan BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, 24 April 2014.

By showing how sovereignty has crystallised itself in the region and how Central Asian states have been practising it both regionally and globally (via its endorsement in the UNGA), it has been show how this sub-regional environment is normatively different from the former patron in terms of sovereignty rights.

It may be worth nothing that the issue of the conceptualisation of sovereignty between Russia and Central Asia came up spontaneously also in one of the interviews I conducted in the region, when a Kazakh IR scholar argued that ‘with respect to sovereignty, Russia is not playing according to the game, to the Central Asian game. Every leader here knows that China is playing according to the rules. If the situations keeps on going like this, China will be more part of the Central Asian system than Russia’.³⁰⁰

This, again, shows how different normative dynamics are in play within the CIS, and how therefore, *contra* Pourchot and Stivachtis, the wider region cannot be considered as a completely uniform society from a normative perspective, but rather one where norms and institutions are being negotiated and disputed.

At the same time, though, as it has been recognised in the course of the thesis and especially in Chapter 5, the role of Russia in structuring international relations between Central Asian states cannot simply be dismissed entirely. According to the literature (see for example Tolstrup 2009; Cameron and Orenstein 2012; Melnykovska et al. 2012), over the years Russia has relied on three main tools to advance these interests: (1) integration of the CIS under Russian domination; (2) the use of military, economic, and political leverage to subordinate the independence of the Caspian states to Russia’s interests; and (3) international recognition of an exclusive Russian-led CIS peacekeeping role.

For better or worse, many states in the region will remain dependent for some time on Russian security guarantees and military assistance and Russia will continue to play a substantial role in shaping political, economic, and security developments. For example, the recent events in Tajikistan, in the course of which a coup d’etat has been attempted by former deputy defense minister General Abduhalim Nazarzoda, have revamped asymmetrical relations between Russia and Tajikistan, with Russia ready to provide for military and economic help in exchange for Tajikistan joining the EEU (Ramani 2015).

300 Interview with Zhar Zhardykhan. Note also the reference to the ‘game’ as a societal element.

But as initially discussed in Chapter 3, this supremacy and primacy have not been translated in effective, legitimate and durable hegemony. Russia's hopes for CIS integration, for example, have been dashed by the refusal thus far of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan to join CIS political and economic structures. These ambitions were dealt a further blow by the recent decision of Uzbekistan to leave CSTO. Consequently, the limited integration that has been achieved to date is largely informal and tenuous. Although some CIS states remain dependent on Russia militarily and economically, especially Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (for the case of Kyrgyzstan, see Lewis 2015), most of this cooperation has been achieved within a bilateral rather than multilateral framework, and after prolonged negotiations.

This complex coexistence of engagement and retreat shows that while Russia may be irreversibly locked into a long-term process of 'involuntary' disengagement from the region, Russian weakness will not necessarily mean Russian passivity, and this will continue to have repercussions on the socio-structural architecture of Central Asia.

In sum, as we have seen in the course of the thesis, Russia still retains power over the region, and we can speak of 'hegemony by invitation' when 'the system' is in danger, that is to say, when the very survival of the units is in danger. The Bear still provides for security and protection in Central Asia when big threats put in danger the whole region. But this power is often negotiated, seldom imposed. As we noted in Chapter 5, bilateral diplomacy and informal communication works between Central Asian states are preferred methods to manage the *raison de système* and, in fact, Russia is kept at bay for fears of self-interested interference.

When this hegemony is not invited, or called for, it becomes a 'tragic hegemony', that is to say, a hegemony that fails to materialise in legitimate hierarchy and that results in unwelcome interference. This 'pendular' condition of Russia's hegemony in the region has been recently noted in the literature (Gayoso Descalzi 2011), and has been called also 'incomplete hegemony' in the light of its both material and legitimacy shortcomings (Jackson 2014: 183).

7.5 Directions for further research

The value of a piece of research can be said to consist in two different, but

nonetheless interrelated, components: the ability to shed light on previously under- or non-researched aspects of a given puzzle, and the ability to open new avenues of inquiry and new challenges to established knowledge. It can be said, therefore, that a valuable piece of research provides answers *as well as* new questions. The answers provided by the present thesis have been discussed above. Here, the linkages to further research, as well as to other disciplines, are discussed and presented.

First, this research enhances the possibility, for the ES, to produce a truly comprehensive comparative sociology of international relations and regional international societies. This work adds to the already published works on Latin America, the Middle East, East Asia, Europe and the wider CIS, as well as South East Asia and Africa in a way that allows to compare for different configurations, institutionalisation and normative cohesion and peculiarity (as opposed to the global level) in different regional/sub-global domains.

Questions to be asked would be, for example, what accounts for a different interpretation of a norm, what similarities exist across regional international societies and why; what the effects of post-colonial developments are on the socio-normative structure of regional international societies; which regions more closely resemble the western/global one and why; whether the presence of a hegemon is likely to generate a particular kind of regional international society; whether particular institutions exist by virtue of historical and/or political legacies, or by virtue of state-weaknesses and regime concerns, and so forth.

Second, this research compels the ES to question its simplistic account of the state as a basic sub-ontology of international society. How states are formed, wherefrom they are formed, through which modes of development and based on what source of legitimacy seem, *prima facie*, important questions to ask to understand the kind of international society formed at the regional level. This research, for example, has made the implicit claim that in Central Asia the combination of post-colonial states, bordered by a powerful and hegemonic former patron, based on relatively weak forms of popular legitimacy, characterised by authoritarian or semi-authoritarian forms of government and with poorly diversified economies have given birth to a strongly pluralist, coexistential international society.

Perhaps this thesis is guilty of focusing more on the practices within the society than on whether their adoption was caused, or rather, affected, by the nature of the state in the region. To what extent this finding is generalizable, however, is still a

matter of doubt in ES and comparative IR studies. But it can be said that this piece of research is a good starting point to reflect on this issue, which has been addressed only very recently (Ba 2014).

Third, departing from the state-centric focus of this thesis, it seems that a fertile terrain for further research would be an investigation into the presence of a Central Asian ‘world society’ in ES terms, defined as non-state actors, mainly people, enjoying ties and relations based on common cultural, civilisational and historical relations. Many interviewees made implicit references to the presence of a thriving and active world society underpinning the Central Asian regional international society, mentioning also the hindrances to developing it due to the strongly sovereignty-centric character of the inter-state level of this society (see Appendix 3).

Nonetheless, it seems that these linkages still exist, and a multi-disciplinary research project combining scholars from IR, history, anthropology, business and cultural studies in general could shed light on this potentially fertile aspect of Central Asian studies (for similar studies in different regions, namely the Middle East and East Asia, see Valbjorn 2009; Kang 2014).³⁰¹ Seen in the tradition of the ES, what is intended here is to complement the structural approach of Bull with the more culturally-informed one of Martin Wight to provide a deeper understanding of the societal and normative dynamics within the region.³⁰²

Fourth, further research should be developed on the possible development of the Central Asian regional international society: will it evolve in the formation of a possible Eurasian international society? And if yes, based on what values, made up of which states and sustained by what institutions? Or will it drift towards a substantial entrenchment of the SCO, thus leaning towards China and strengthening its pluralist character by rejecting fully-fledged cooperation with Russia? Or will it evolve autonomously, and will we observe a revival of the ‘indigenous projects’ of the 1990s? Political resistance to further integration within a Eurasian space and economic hurdles experienced by Central Asians due to global factors affecting Russia’s economy such as sanctions and falls in oil prices may be a possible

301 Of course, this would likely not be limited to the five republics of Central Asia, but would possibly expand further to Mongolia, Iran and northern Afghanistan. This would be a ‘sub-innovative’ field of research for the ES; namely to investigate the coterminous aspects of (regional) international and (regional) world societies.

302 I am thankful to Dr Peter Duncan for discussing this topic with me during the last BISA Conference in Dublin, 20-21 June 2014.

indication of the difficulties in forming a fully cooperative-solidarist regional international society capable of going beyond regime-protection solidarity.

Deeper ties within the SCO are also difficult to observe in the immediate future, as the organisation itself seems to be currently uncertain on its future developments. But, as observed above, more solid ties within it may serve as a 'management of great powers' strategy to preserve room for manoeuvre for the Central Asian republics, and to off-set the two giants on their borders.

A return to a solidarist regional international society seems unlikely given the on-going definitions of foreign policies, national agendas, economic modes of development and underlying power-political factors across the region, in particular in the south-eastern flank.³⁰³ Yet, the fact that political as well as economic consultations are on the rise in the region, as noted above, may be read as a sign of a nascent opportunity for the weak Central Asian international society to become more mature and less conflict prone.

Given the findings of this research, the most accurate prediction would be perhaps the permanence of Central Asia as a weak regional security complex as well as a weak, sovereignty-centred international society, careful in examining the prospects of enlargement and integration, both internally and externally. The endogenous factors (regime-change facing the two main actors, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and economic development) as well as the exogenous, systemic ones (development of the Afghan conflict in the light of ISAF withdrawal, evolution of Sino-Russian ties, viability of the Eurasian Economic Union, evolution of norms and institutions at the global level) are too important and too powerful to be dismissed from the analysis. But more time and more solid research are needed to trace their development in a consistent way.

7.6 The last word? In fact, the first

Going back to what was said in the introduction to this thesis, it can be said that this

303 An Uzbek diplomat argued that, even if time is not ripe due to differences in socio-economic status of regional countries, 'integration between Central Asian countries is still an option on the table'. Yet, the entrenchment of bilateralism as a regional norm and Karimov's recent rejection of this plan is an indicator of the difficulty of this option, at least in the short-, medium-term. Interview with official Uzbek source.

work is the first of its kind: a socio-normative analysis of the five Central Asian republics had yet to be provided, described and accounted for in the wider literatures of International Relations and Area Studies. By avoiding a mere analytical analysis and focusing on both structural *and* interpretive narratives, a multi-faceted, more comprehensive and more complex reading of international relations in Central Asia has been offered by identifying, consistently with the premises, norms, rules and institutions operating between countries, evolving over time, and helping them stabilise the environment they live in and manage.

While a markedly specific, indigenous ‘Central Asian’ international society has been difficult to discern from the global level, by virtue of its recent birth, its being ‘in flux’ and the interfering presence of great power politics operating in the region, the norms identified and brought to the surface make a modest but nonetheless innovative contribution to the literature on the region by providing a totally new theoretical perspective.

Now that IR theory has been linked to Central Asia, the hope is that new questions, new puzzles and new problematiques, as those identified above, will keep researchers and scholars on the region busy for the years to come, and possibly inaugurating a new agenda. Far from being the last word on the topic, this thesis strongly hopes to be the first one of a fruitful, dynamic and thoughtful body of research that compares the evolution, the impact and the interpretation of different norms and institutions across the world, as well as sharper and deeper studies of how such norms and institutions will shape the conformation of the region in the next years.

Lastly, this research has shown that for a more sophisticated, less (intellectually) hierarchical reading of international relations and to avoid imposing readings and narratives which may run the risk of being theoretically hegemonic in a domain different from the Western one, the role of local practitioners is crucial to understand how norms and institutions are understood and played out. In this way, following the methodological intentions spelled out in Chapter 3, this thesis has exported the ES abroad and given voice to local international-relations makers, thus combining emic and etic epistemologies.

With this move, it is hoped that Central Asia can move from being a mere ‘chessboard’ in great power politics to being considered more as an arena where intra-regional dynamics are important as well, and it is hoped that the ES can become more

flexible in its understanding of international societies world-widely. By encouraging mutual beneficial dialogue between ES, area studies and regionalism, this thesis has aimed at being the starting point for thriving cross-disciplinary research, and hopes to foster more dialogue between disciplines, traditions, schools of thought and research communities in the West and Central Asia.

Should this research be expanded, debated, contested or simply be discussed by ES theorists, area scholars, Western and Central Asian practitioners and academics in general, this would be already a success. Should this research provide a more complex, a more nuanced, a more comprehensive and a more faithful account of international relations in Central Asia, doing justice to local diplomats' and experts' perceptions of their own environment, this would be perhaps its greatest success.

Appendix 1

Indicative questions for interviews

What is, in your opinion, Central Asia? What does it mean? Who is part of it?

What is the perception of sovereignty of your country?

What is the role played by sovereignty as a policy-motivator?

What, according to you, constitutes a threat to sovereignty in Central Asia?

According to you, is sovereignty respected in the region?

What kinds of activities would you regard as a violation of sovereignty?

Do you feel bound by any rules in dealing with your neighbours?

What kind of neighbour does your country try to be?

What kind of behaviour do you expect from a neighbour? Or

What examples can you cite in the region of 'good-neighbourly' (or 'bad-neighbourly') behaviour?

What, according to you, should a state in the region NOT do when relating to others?

How do you assess the role played by international law in the region? Can you provide specific examples? Has it been used to resolve disputes?

What is your country's perception of borders? Are they a means of communication or closure?

Is the protection of environment a key factor in your international relations? Can you provide some examples?

Do you see Great Powers as a menace? Do you see them as entitled to special rights and duties?

Do you consider diplomacy as the standard way of communication among countries in the region?

Do you consider your country as a Central Asian one? If so, why?

Why, according to you, is there no Central Asian political institution/organisation?

How are the relations of your country with the other Central Asian states?

How do you evaluate the experience of Central Asian Union in the 1990s? And Central Asian Cooperation Organisation in the early 2000s? How has cooperation in the region developed throughout the years, and why so?

What are the prospects for future regional cooperation?

Why according to you there has never been inter-state war in Central Asia?

What is the role played by the market economy in the region? Would you consider your country as following market-economy precepts?

Do you think that Central Asian countries should cooperate more? If yes, why? And on what principles?

Is there a 'common strategy' of Central Asian countries within international organisations?

Is Russia a Central Asian country? If not, how is it related to/perceived in the region?

Is there anything peculiarly 'Central Asian' in how your states conducts its international relations?

In your opinion, do the states of Central Asia form a regional international society, i.e. a group of states where common rules and norms are usually (not always) respected? If yes, then: What distinguishes this region from its broader environment? Which countries of the region, in your opinion, are members of this society?

In your opinion, which are the norms, rules, institutions and other elements that bound this society together?

Appendix 2

Examples of narratives on Central Asia

Interview with Kazakh Professor 2 at KIMEP University, 13 November 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan: ‘Kazakhstan is now part of [Central Asia]. We are different but we are also similar. Economically we are different, political institutions we are different. Even sometimes in terms of traditions. At the same time we accept the term Central Asia, it is in current discourses. Mongolia and Afghanistan are still a bit out. Soviet inheritance is still crucial. Five major stans are preferable. Regions are never too much coherent’.

Interview with Kazakh expert 1, 13 November 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan: ‘The region is made up of five post-soviet countries. The historical meaning is very different from the geopolitical one, because it was much bigger. Why these five countries? These countries are not only united by the borders, by common borders, they also have a cultural heritage due to the soviet past, as well as similar economic systems. Due to the Soviet rule, which lasted for 70 years, these countries became even more similar to each other than to their other neighbours. And they also have a common transport and energy system’.

Interview with diplomatic source in Kazakhstan, 12 May 2014, location undisclosed: ‘Central Asia is one of our priority vector, if not the priority vector: because of roots, of culture, of proximity. It was stressed also during the last meeting between our President and Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan. Sure the region exists, any time we speak of foreign policy in this area, we refer to Central Asia’.

Interview with Dosym Satpaev, Political Risk Assessment Group, 18 November 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan: ‘According to the post-Soviet definition, Central Asia consists of five republics; then we have the Western definition, the five post-Soviet republics plus other states, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Iran...big Central Asia! But I must say this latter definition here in Kazakhstan is not very popular, and here when we speak of Central Asia, here we mean the five post-Soviet republics. I think this because of the Soviet heritage. It is interesting, however, to note that recently Kazakhstan affiliated itself not with Central Asia, but with Eurasia. Often now officials say we are not a Central Asian country, we are Eurasian. But it is less because of culture; rather, because Nazarbayev likes to portray himself as a regional leader, even world leader! And Central Asia is too small’.

Interview with Sultan Akimbekov, Director of the Institute for World Economy and Politics, 20 November 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan: ‘The definition, for me, [...], is the five countries: it’s dominating, in academia, in science, it means five post-Soviet republics. It is ambitious, and I agree with this definition. It means something like “Central”, you know, we are situated there; it is very useful, because it means that in this region there are concentrated all big powers, like Russia and China and the US, and also a lot of regional powers, Iran, Saudi Arabia, also Europe...it’s difficult to find any other place in the world with such a concentration. Kazakhstan is more comfortable with “middle Asia”, because neighbours are poor and less stable, but internationally the concept is sound, and Kazakhstan is part of it, actually the main

part of it’.

Interview with Kamoluddin Abdullaev, Tajik Historian, 15 January 2014, Skype interview from Milan, Italy: ‘despite the artificiality of the states there and the use of modern concepts to describe something that in the past did not exist, such as sovereignty and nation, Central Asia is indeed one region. In the past it was composed by the sedentary tribes at the centre and the nomadic tribes at the margins, forming a systems of relations, and nowadays it is made up of the five former republics, partly because of identity (they refuse to join other ‘worlds’, only now we have a narrative of Eurasianism) and partly because of necessity following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. There was an urge to define themselves. Of course, the position of Tajikistan is quite unique. It is not fully Turkic, it is a mistake to consider it fully Persian, it was created by Stalin in order to weaken the position of communist Turks, especially in the 1920. There is some mutual attraction with Iran, but less than it is usually thought. There are differences in Islam, in priorities of foreign policy, even cultural matters are a bit frozen now. But Rahmon is willing to play the Iranian card to disentangle himself from Uzbekistan and other forms of pressure coming from the region. Nonetheless, Tajikistan fully shares the problems and the feature of Central Asia such as borders, water, weak state, Soviet inheritance etc. This is why it is correct to identify it as a Central Asian country, in my opinion as a scholar and as a Tajik’.

Interview with Roman Mogilevskii, Director of IPPA, 26 November 2013, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: ‘For me, Central Asia is five post-Soviet countries. [...] Usually Kazakhstan is not happy to be associated with its poorer neighbours, but that’s the case, I mean, they have too much in common, you know, lots of things, culture, mentality, institutions. Sure, we have divergent paths, and institutionally we are getting different, but for me an indication that we are indeed a region is...I know many people question that, and they have good arguments, and internal cooperation is very far from being effective, but my point is that they understand each other, we understand us much better than what’s going on in other countries, even with Caucasian countries we have less understanding, we have a different mentality. It’s not just understanding...it’s understanding in detail: psychology, few clear ways of behaviour. Few years ago I was working for UNICEF and I travelled to all five countries. I did appreciate of course how different we are now, but I also clearly understood why people did or did not do something, immediately. I am a professional on the region [and from the region, so I feel I can generalise, also at the level of the society’.

Interview with Bermet Tursunkulova, Vice-President of Academic Affairs and Professor of International Relations, AUCA, 27 November 2013, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: ‘For natives of Kyrgyzstan, traditionally the five former republics of Central Asia keep the relationship to the term. There are other arguments linking Afghanistan and other countries to the region, but for now it’s Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It is exactly these five countries because of their post-Soviet past, which affected their mentality...mentality, but also the kinship if I may say, at the societal level. For Kyrgyzs, Kazakhstan is absolutely part of the region, I even forgot in Soviet times it was Kazakhstan and Srednaya Asia!’

Interview with Shairbek Juraev, Independent Analyst, 28 November 2013, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: ‘For me, the notion of Central Asia should remain relevant; [...] what makes the region is still some form of more or less inter-societiness, there are also geographical, cultural, linguistic ties that keep us together from our past, so I don’t really buy the whole debate about disputing the term [...]. So for me, Central Asia should be seen as states part of a post-Soviet space who have common issues, common conflicts, common priorities of concerns etc. Kazakhstan is very much integral part of the region in terms of water-sharing, agriculture, communication routes, especially with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan’.

Interview with Emil Juraev, Professor and analyst, AUCA, 2 December 2013, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: ‘At the end of the Soviet Union, it was clear that these countries had shared something in common, again, especially as opposed to the rest of the world, in terms of development, in terms of culture, in terms of being similar and being Muslim part of ex-Soviet republics...During the Soviet Union...[...] the CA republics were seen as something at the backward part, the distinct part, the mostly agricultural part etc. etc. When the USSR collapsed, Kazakhstan was not so comfortable to share such a long border with Russia, especially in the north where there were a lot of Russians, this was an incentive to be identified with the southern region, rather than to stay independent, to be part of no region and to be exposed to Russian influence’.

Interview with Marat Kazakhbayev, Senior Analyst, IPP, 2 December 2013, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: Now Central Asia means five countries: ‘Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. I agree with this definition, because politically speaking and economically speaking Azerbaijan is more closely related to the Caucasus rather than Central Asia. And of course Kazakhstan is part of Central Asia, especially from a political viewpoint. The factors linking together these five countries are political and economic. Also from a comparative point of view, all the regimes are similar and connected. Another factor linking these five states together is the geopolitical one: they form a centre where the interests of Great Powers converge’.

Interview with former Kyrgyz Diplomat now Member of the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 2 May 2014: ‘The region exists, we refer to it, I would include also Uighur territories, at least as far as culture is concerned. We have been living together for centuries! We have also the same attitude towards things, we have the same idea of Islam...we are far from Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan...I don’t consider them as Central Asian countries. For me, there is no doubt that Kazakhstan is a Central Asian country. Historically, we are one people. Now of course they are oriented also to other parts of the world, but we feel they are part of the region, and I think they think the same, too. They speak of Central Asia as well’.

Interview with a Central Asian representative of the UNRCCA, Central Asian capital, 29 November 2013: ‘I refer to Central Asia as, first of all, the five post-Soviet republics...Of course there are a lot of interpretations of the region and so on but I think, I mean the beauty of this term is in its simplicity. It just describes the five countries, and everything related to them, you know, everyone gets it. This is Central Asia, so we mean five “stans” countries, and that’s it. [...] I am fine with the term...of course it’s difficult to call it a region, because it has a lot of differences, and first of all

maybe the countries do not want to become a true region, but in general it is a region, I mean, it's a geographic...common space...and I think it has the right to exist. [...] When you say 'the Middle East', you have an immediate image in mind, you have your own stereotypes...the same happens with Central Asia'.

Interview with Uzbek sources 3 and 4, 13 December 2013, location undisclosed: 'Central Asia is an existing and identifiable region, made up of the five former republics. This is because of political relations, and also because of history, legacy and culture. Of course, we recognise that there are many differences among the states in the region, but that the degree of interconnectedness is extremely high. There is no other option than having close ties with our neighbours. It is a post-imperial reality, in the sense that while these states are looking for their own space in international relations, the legacies of the previous imperial past are keeping them together such as borders, minorities, water and so forth'.

Interview with Uzbek Diplomatic source, 12 February 2014, location undisclosed: 'If we speak in geographical and political terms, we are speaking of five countries. Full stop. However, in a cultural, ethnographic sense, Central Asia is wider. We should also not forget that there are different attempts to "read" the region. Turkic readings, religious, some even want a caliphate, to unite then Central Asia and South Asia. We should also pay attention to the provenience of the researcher. In each part of the world there are different understandings. We interpret the region as made up of five countries. The position of Kazakhstan is of course controversial because of the Custom Union, the Eurasian Union and so forth. You know, there is even a "Srednaya Aziya i Kazakhstan" position in Tashkent, arguing for a Central Asia made up of four countries without Kazakhstan, but it is not very popular. In sum, the region should be five states. The five stans. Why? Because, I mean, look at our surroundings. In a geographical/political, cultural/political terms, there is a gap with South Asia. The Uzbeks in Afghanistan are different from us. Also the language is different. There, you can clearly see the 70-year long partition. Mentally, behaviourally, we are worlds apart. China is a different civilisation and anyway, yes, there is Xinjiang with a strong Uighur component, but politically it's part of the sovereign state of China! Russia? We are different in terms of religion, perhaps less in terms of culture. Most importantly, the governments in the region do refer to Central Asia, even Kazakhstan. For us, for Uzbekistan, not only Central Asia exists, but is also top-priority. Our neighbours come first. In importance, Afghanistan comes later, even if we share a border. In the region, borders are more open than with Afghanistan. We do recognise we are interdependent, we are landlocked. Of course there are disagreements, but we all recognise the inevitability of our interdependence. The countries here try to differentiate themselves, but in the end they can't escape from the net. It is good that each country tries to find its own identity, it is a right, but politically, economically and culturally we are too much bond to each other. And note: every time a Central Asian country is not included in a single integration project, such project is doomed to fail. For Kazakhstan, in order to become elite, it is necessary to have neighbours on his side'.

Appendix 3

Examples of references to norms, rules and international society elements

Interview with Uzbek Source 1 and Uzbek Source 2, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7 November 2013, Tashkent, Uzbekistan: ‘Values in the region, accepted by all states, are those of peace, how is it called....tranquillity (Uzbek 2) Yes! Tranquillity! Tranquillity and harmony, both at the level of government and at the level of peoples. Peace and stability are utmost values, top-priority. They are almost religious values!’

Interview with Askar Nursha, independent Kazakh expert, 14 November 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan: ‘The most evident aspect of the Soviet heritage is in the mentality. Their sense of unity was forged during the Soviet period. The memory of central brands is still perceived as part of a common something. Also, in the region you have respect for authority rather than for rule of law’.

Interview with Bulat Auelbaev, KISI, 15 November 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan: ‘Non-interference is a necessity, there must be adherence to international law by the countries of the region. If we had intervened in the Russian-Georgian conflict, then we would have legitimated intervention in other zones close to us, like Xinjiang.

1. Balance of Power. Although I mentioned that there is no integration, it does not mean that it won’t happen. Although all the states chose a different mode of development, they all adhere to the balance of power, because the danger in changing the balance of power operates as a constraint. Identification with Iran is not accepted, Chinese identification is not accepted, there is a reaction also to Russian culture. The identification of Kyrgyzstan with the US was evident in the results of the revolution.
2. Development: social stability, very much interlinked. All countries in the region want to develop. Even Rogun, with all its controversies, can be seen in the prism of development. The desire to develop also gives directions for economic activities. Given that the West developed so quickly, it is hard to ignore the West. And of course Russia as well, and also China.
3. Political stability: social stability and political stability are associated with economic stability, this is why Karimov, for example, always quotes numbers and figures; also Nazarbayev, Rahmon...
4. Sovereignty: sovereignty is a very sensitive issue, because all these countries are not only on their way to development, but in the process of state-identification and statehood as well. It’s an internal problem for each country. Until borders among the countries will not be fully demarcated, sovereignty will always be a priority issue.
5. Peaceful coexistence in the region. While many say that the region is volatile, this is not true because everything in the region is aimed at peaceful coexistence between the countries. In terms of formality, some issues make this coexistence still not yet ripe, so the formal establishment of effective mechanisms for coexistence and integration, such as water resources, until they have a clear-cut understanding of whom does the water in the river belongs to they will not be able to build effective formal institutions or organisations for that purpose. What we have now are stages, stages of development of a formal framework. There is

an informal system of peaceful coexistence that stems from the realisation of the necessity of this coexistence, and then we will see if it becomes integration. And the main components of this informal coexistence are international law and diplomacy

If the countries did not appreciate the value of peaceful coexistence, countries of the region would have already departed from each other, signing deals with external propositions, and even geographical proximity would not contain those differences (like in the Caucasus)’.

Interview with Kazakh Professor 2 at KIMEP University, 13 November 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan: ‘If I may say, what is specific Central Asian in this “peaceful coexistence” is the constant reference, in our historical-cultural development, to “symbiosis”. It is both domestic and international. All states are a sort of hybrid, but they don’t mention that! It is something which is really flexible, based on interaction. And this symbiosis is always reflected in criticism: if you cooperate with the EU, you are too Western; if you cooperate with Russia, you are too Russian; if you develop, you are too far from traditional values: we are always halfway! There is also a matter of legitimacy: what sort of leader you are if you cannot create some kind of...order, in your neighbouring area; we have been living together for centuries! It is a matter of shame. Leaders in Central Asia may exaggerate things sometimes, but again, within certain limits.’

Interview with Marat Kazakhbayev, 2 December 2013, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: ‘[In Central Asia] there is no open conflict, but the potential is there. But why no conflict? There are some mechanisms to avoid the escalation. Now, the first mechanism is the fact that, in the end, people agree on matters. Second, the fact that there is good inter-state level mediation. You mentioned commissions, right? These smoothen tensions, even if they are not very effective in terms of results. And a third factor, perhaps the most important one, is that for example in the Ferghana Valley there is a high potential for conflict, right? Well, the leaders of the countries still defer this conflict, there is a common understanding that a conflict there would be explosive. The leaders still prefer tensions and micro-conflicts to open conflicts that may lead to instability. A bad peace is better than a good war. All of them understand that open conflict would not be beneficial for any of the sides. The conflict is never solved, but it is always cooled down.’

Interview with Mars Sariev, 3 December 2013, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: ‘To be surprised by the absence of conflict in Central Asia is something really European. In the European history, you see that the approach that European adopted was an offensive one, with conflicts, conquests, so this is why you have this perspective. A European would expect to have conflict here, but it is different. In Central Asia, there is a different perspective. Peoples of Central Asia refer to an ethic code, a codex, dating back to Chingis Khan, which emphasises collectivism rather than individualism. For example, it is tradition to join a person who is having food. It is a rejection of individualism. In Central Asia, there is a united society, a sense of commonality. For example, this is why conflict between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, between Karimov and our leadership, can be contained, can be regulated. We know this codex, there can still be mediation’

Interview with Kamoluddin Abdullaev, 15 January 2014, Skype interview from Milan, Italy: ‘War is absent because of regional solidarity. Despite disagreements, minor conflicts, skirmishes and cleavages, the region is still intact because of the Soviet past, of the common mentality, of the pre-eminence of the state as a subject of international relations and because of the peaceful culture of the society at the very general level. There are scars, such as the civil war in Tajikistan, that prevent conflicts from escalating. There is no tolerance of violence. Also, the presidents understand this very well. When they meet, it is commonly known they drink together, speak about these issues with the aim of cooling them down, they share lots of cultural traits, contacts at high level are a huge deterrent for war in this region’.

Interview with official Uzbek source, 12 February 2014, location undisclosed: ‘Inter-agencies ties in Central Asia are deep. They are immediate, swift. And you know, in this region, 99% of the time, diplomacy is used to prevent conflict, not to solve it! Preventive! These inter-agencies work effectively’.

Interview with Farkhod Tolipov, 6 February 2014, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, Skype interview from London, UK: ‘informal contacts play a pivotal role. With Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan there are several interactions across borders, between officials, guards, contacts are kept alive, there is diplomacy. Should anything happen with respect to gas and water, there is immediate communication. These are really Central Asian specifics’.

Appendix 4

Examples of references to the state of international society in Central Asia

Interview with Kazakh expert 1, 13 November 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan: ‘There are a number of things that these countries have not passed through, a lot of challenges, so there is an opportunity for more solidarism’.

Interview with Askar Nursha, independent Kazakh expert, 14 November 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan: ‘There is an international society in formation in Central Asia, they are getting there but it is not there’.

Interview with Zhenis Kembayev, Professor of International Law, KIMEP University, 15 November 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan: ‘Central Asian states adhere to a classical approach to international relations. [...] If we try to impose new, formal rules, here we may encounter resistance. Adaptation must be evolutionary, otherwise it can be even counterproductive. We entered a system with already established norms. Before independence, we were in a different world’.

Interview with Aidos Sarym, Political Risk Assessment Group, 17 November 2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan: ‘Central Asia is an international society, developing. If you read the literature after the two World Wars, there were signals of despair, but then the system always recovered. It can happen here. The world also is interested in a stable and manageable Central Asia’.

Interview with Shairbek Juraev, Independent Analyst, 28 November 2013, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: ‘To some extent, I agree with the idea that in Central Asia there are some mechanisms, some norms that prevent the situation from deteriorating. Of course, I am not pushing the argument to the extent that these mechanisms will prevent violence...there is a lot of violence...but yes, overall, they are in play. And they are informal. In the West, in the Western understanding, certain things are given, like the law, the state...here, they are negotiable’.

Interview with Payam Foroughi, Researcher, OSCE Academy, 30 November 2013, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: ‘To characterise Central Asia as an international society is to describe the region at this stage, it’s a very good observational framework, also on the water and war issues, they understand they have to follow the sovereignty issue, with a Westphalian interpretation, modern...with all these meetings that they have, it’s all basically aimed at avoiding war...which is basically the international society formula...maybe everything is not institutionalised...you know...but...I mean, I don’t want to...but they do have their conflict resolution mechanisms, the states understand the risks...’.

Interview with Azamat Temirkulov, Professor of International Relations at AUCA, 5 December 2013, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: ‘The international society approach is a very interesting approach...it’s a combination of neorealism and neoliberalism...which tries also to take into account what has not been previously taken into account by neorealism and neoliberalism, which is informal rules and informal institutions...but

which really exist in the international arena. Of course this is present in Central Asia, of course! International law is not always respected by Central Asian leaders...but nonetheless....there are red lines, understandings....you know...Central Asia is an international society...but we even can't call them norms, because norms are something established and practiced for quite a long period, but here it is not something practiced for long'.

Interview with Kamoluddin Abdullaev, Tajik Historian, 15 January 2014, Skype interview from Milan, Italy: 'institutions in Central Asia are "in dynamics" [sic]. They entered the world system absolutely with no idea of what these norms were. They had to rely on Russia' [he mentioned some meetings in the US, where he was living in 1994, with Tajiks 'diplomats' not speaking any English and with Russian advisors], but 'now Central Asian states are becoming more confident, more aware of their prerogatives. They manage to play multivectoral foreign policies, they are able to manoeuvre themselves in the international arena. Of course with difficulties because they are new and weak states, but they learnt the rules of the game'.

Interview with Farkhod Tolipov, Director, Bilim Karvoni Education Institution, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 6 February 2014, Skype interview from London, UK: '[after listening to the definition of international society he said] I agree with this reading, to a great extent. Although they are not much inclined to cooperation, international norms region-wide, historically-shaped relationships and social cohesiveness can let us speak of something like that. Realist and Liberal readings of the region have not been very much productive'.

Appendix 5

Central Asia's Voting Convergence in the UNGA

The tables below show the dyads analysed using the United Nations General Assembly Voting Dataset, which contains also the Affinity of Nations scores (Strezhnev and Voeten 2013). The variable considered has been 'agree3un' – Voting similarity index using the interval (0-1) – computed using 3 category vote data (1 = 'yes' or approval for an issue; 2 = 'abstain', 3 = 'no' or disapproval for an issue.) - Abstention, therefore, is counted as half-agreement with a yes or no vote. I considered the 'agree3un' variable since 1992 (first date available) and computed it for each dyad of Central Asian countries (10 dyads) and then calculated the mathematical average value for each dyad. Not all years were available. Also, dyads with Russia and each of the Central Asian republics have been analysed.

TK - TJ	
1	1992
0.961538	1993
0.922222	1994
0.875	1995
1	1996
0.866667	1997
0.921053	1998
0.982759	1999
0.97619	2000
-	2001
0.956522	2002
0.919643	2003
0.94	2004
0.963636	2005
0.954545	2006
0.96	2007
0.980392	2008
0.980392	2009
0.973214	2010
0.962963	2011
0.975	2012

0.953586852

TK – KG	
0.944444	1992
0.944444	1993
0.925	1994
0.954545	1995
0.833333	1996
0.890625	1997
0.9	1998
-	1999
0.931818	2000
-	2001
0.958333	2002
0.92623	2003
0.942308	2004
0.927273	2005
0.940678	2006
0.959184	2007
0.95098	2008
0.962963	2009
0.95	2010
0.954545	2011
0.958333	2012

0.934475672

TK - UZ	
-	1992
-	1993
0.940476	1994
0.833333	1995
0.8	1996
0.833333	1997
0.852941	1998
0.846154	1999
0.941177	2000
-	2001
0.857143	2002
0.797297	2003
0.84	2004
0.951923	2005
0.938597	2006
0.940476	2007
0.95	2008
0.960784	2009
0.962963	2010
0.935185	2011
0.941667	2012

0.895747192

TK – KZ	
0.964286	1992
0.913793	1993
0.920455	1994
0.923077	1995
0.75	1996
0.909091	1997
0.925	1998
0.962963	1999
0.954545	2000
0.958333	2001
0.96	2002
0.909836	2003
0.935185	2004
0.927273	2005
0.932203	2006
0.941177	2007
0.941177	2008
0.953704	2009
0.973214	2010
0.964286	2011
0.975	2012

0.93307605

TJ - KG	
0.833333	1992
0.952381	1993
0.79	1994
0.8	1995
0.924242	1996
0.844444	1997
0.935897	1998
-	1999
0.971429	2000
-	2001
0.976744	2002
0.975807	2003
0.966102	2004
0.955882	2005
0.985507	2006
0.991936	2007
0.978571	2008
0.983871	2009

TJ - UZ	
-	1992
-	1993
0.87963	1994
0.9	1995
0.875	1996
0.828125	1997
0.757143	1998
0.776596	1999
1	2000
-	2001
0.851351	2002
0.930556	2003
0.888889	2004
0.975	2005
0.992188	2006
0.980392	2007
0.970149	2008
0.982456	2009

0.936364	2010
0.974576	2011
0.961538	2012

0.933611867

0.939655	2010
0.965517	2011
0.960938	2012

0.914088008

TJ - KZ	
0.9	1992
0.928571	1993
0.87069	1994
0.859375	1995
0.902439	1996
0.911111	1997
0.9625	1998
0.877359	1999
0.930556	2000
-	2001
0.957447	2002
0.955224	2003
0.959677	2004
0.963235	2005
0.985507	2006
0.984375	2007
0.957143	2008
0.960317	2009
0.942623	2010
0.941667	2011
0.953846	2012

0.935183094

KG - UZ	
-	1992
-	1993
0.916667	1994
0.782609	1995
0.836538	1996
0.871429	1997
0.842105	1998
	1999
0.931035	2000
-	2001
0.847222	2002
0.9125	2003
0.890909	2004
0.96875	2005
0.978571	2006
0.973684	2007
0.977941	2008
1	2009
0.943396	2010
0.931035	2011
0.96875	2012

0.916067112

KG - KZ	
1	1992
0.939394	1993
0.901961	1994
0.9125	1995
0.908333	1996
0.9	1997
0.972222	1998
-	1999
0.919643	2000
-	2001
0.957447	2002
0.962687	2003
0.967213	2004
0.979452	2005
0.987179	2006

UZ - KZ	
-	1992
-	1993
0.924528	1994
0.804348	1995
0.821429	1996
0.8	1997
0.8375	1998
0.923913	1999
0.964286	2000
-	2001
0.8625	2002
0.925	2003
0.912281	2004
0.96875	2005
0.964286	2006

0.952703	2007
0.965278	2008
0.962121	2009
0.955357	2010
0.943548	2011
0.931818	2012

0.948360874

0.925	2007
0.948529	2008
0.983333	2009
0.925	2010
0.889831	2011
0.914063	2012

0.905254204

RU - TK	
0.9	1992
0.844828	1993
0.777778	1994
0.884615	1995
0.666667	1996
0.848485	1997
0.785714	1998
0.844828	1999
0.818182	2000
0.854167	2001
0.84	2002
0.857143	2003
0.872727	2004
0.861111	2005
0.881356	2006
0.87	2007
0.882353	2008
0.861111	2009
0.866071	2010
0.857143	2011
0.825	2012

0.842822774

RU - TJ	
0.840909	1992
0.857143	1993
0.881356	1994
0.875	1995
0.853659	1996
0.844444	1997
0.792683	1998
0.861538	1999
0.868421	2000
-	2001
0.861702	2002
0.947761	2003
0.934426	2004
0.902985	2005
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0.904762	2007
0.878571	2008
0.873016	2009
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0.891667	2011
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0.877046831

RU - KG	
0.933333	1992
0.80303	1993
0.701923	1994
0.725	1995
0.830509	1996
0.830769	1997
0.827273	1998
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0.918033	2000
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0.836957	2002
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RU - UZ	
-	1992
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0.787037	1994
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0.904762	2004
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0.886364	2009
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0.862903	2011
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0.87931	2004
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RU - KZ	
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0.872881	2000
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0.924658	2003
0.926471	2004
0.89726	2005
0.914634	2006
0.881579	2007
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